

SERMONS

BY

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AND

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UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

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OF THE AUTHOR,

By JAMES FINLAYSON, D.D.

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[Preached 18th April, 1793, on the day of a National Fast appointed by Government, on occasion of the War with the French Republic.]

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A
SHORT ACCOUNT
OF
THE LIFE AND CHARACTER
OF
DR. HUGH BLAIR.

DR. HUGH BLAIR was born in Edinburgh, on the 7th day of April, 1718. His father, John Blair, a respectable merchant in that city, was a descendant of the ancient family of Blair, in Ayrshire, and grandson of the famous Mr. Robert Blair, Minister of St. Andrew's, Chaplain to Charles I., and one of the most zealous and distinguished clergymen of the period in which he lived. This worthy man, though firmly attached to the cause of freedom, and to the Presbyterian form of church government, and though actively engaged in all the measures adopted for their support; yet, by his steady, temperate conduct, commanded the respect even of his opponents. In preference to all the other ecclesiastical leaders of the covenanting party, he was selected by the King himself to fill an office which, from the circumstances of the time, gave frequent access to the Royal Person: "be-
" cause," said His Majesty, "that man is pious, prudent, learned,
" and of a meek and moderate calm temper."—His talents seem to have descended as an inheritance to his posterity. For, of the two sons who survived him, David, the eldest, was a clergyman of eminence in Edinburgh, father to Mr. Robert Blair, Minister of Athelstonford, the celebrated author of the poem intitled *The Grave*; and grandfather to His Majesty's Solicitor General for Scotland, whose masculine eloquence and profound knowledge of law have, in the public estimation, placed him indisputably at the head of the Scottish bar. From his youngest son Hugh, who engaged in business as a merchant, and had the honour to fill a high station in the magistracy of Edinburgh, sprung the learned clergyman, who is the subject of this narrative.

The views of Dr. Blair, from his earliest youth, were turned towards the Church, and his education received a suitable direction. After the usual grammatical course at school, he entered the Humanity Class in the University of Edinburgh, in October, 1730, and spent eleven years at that celebrated seminary, assiduously employed in the literary and scientific studies prescribed by the Church of Scotland to all who are to become candidates for her licence to preach the Gospel. During this important period, he was distinguished among his companions both for diligence and proficiency; and ob-

tained from the Professors under whom he studied, repeated testimonies of approbation. One of them deserves to be mentioned particularly, because, in his own opinion, it determined the bent of his genius towards polite literature. An essay, Περὶ τοῦ καλοῦ; or, *On the Beautiful*, written by him when a student of logic in the usual course of academical exercises, had the good fortune to attract the notice of Professor Stevenson, and with circumstances honourable to the author, was appointed to be read in public at the conclusion of the Session. This mark of distinction made a deep impression on his mind; and the essay which merited it, he ever after recollected with partial affection, and preserved to the day of his death as the first earnest of his fame.

At this time Dr. Blair commenced a method of study which contributed much to the accuracy and extent of his knowledge, and which he continued to practise occasionally even after his reputation was fully established. It consisted in making abstracts of the most important works which he read, and in digesting them according to the train of his own thoughts. History, in particular, he resolved to study in this manner; and, in concert with some of his youthful associates, he constructed a very comprehensive scheme of chronological tables, for receiving into its proper place every important fact that should occur. The scheme devised by this young student for his own private use was afterwards improved, filled up, and given to the Public by his learned friend Dr. John Blair, Prebendary of Westminster, in his valuable work, “*The Chronology and History of the World.*”

In the year 1739, Dr. Blair took his degree of A. M. On that occasion he printed and defended a thesis *De Fundamentis et Obligatione Legis Nature*, which contains a short, but masterly discussion of this important subject, and exhibits, in elegant Latin, an outline of the moral principles, which have been since more fully unfolded and illustrated in his Sermons.

The University of Edinburgh, about this period, numbered among her pupils many young men who were soon to make a distinguished figure in the civil, the ecclesiastical, and the literary history of their country. With most of them Dr. Blair entered into habits of intimate connexion, which no future competition or jealousy occurred to interrupt, which held them united through life in their views of public good, and which had the most beneficial influence on their own improvement, on the progress of elegance and taste among their contemporaries, and on the general interests of the community to which they belonged.

On the completion of this academical course, he underwent the customary trials before the Presbytery of Edinburgh, and received from that venerable body a licence to preach the Gospel, on the 21st of October, 1741. His public life now commenced with very favourable prospects. The reputation which he brought from the University was fully justified by his first appearances in the pulpit; and, in a few months, the fame of his eloquence procured for him a presentation to the parish of Colessie in Fife, where he was ordained to the

office of the holy ministry, on the 23d of September, 1742. But he was not permitted to remain long in this rural retreat. A vacancy in the second charge of the Canongate of Edinburgh furnished to his friends an opportunity of recalling him to a station more suited to his talents. And, though one of the most popular and eloquent clergymen in the church was placed in competition with him, a great majority of the electors decided in favour of this young orator, and restored him in July, 1743, to the bounds of his native city.

In this station Dr. Blair continued eleven years, discharging with great fidelity and success the various duties of the pastoral office. His discourses from the pulpit in particular attracted universal admiration. They were composed with uncommon care; and, occupying a middle place between the dry metaphysical discussion of one class of preachers, and the loose incoherent declamation of another, they blended together, in the happiest manner, the light of argument, with the warmth of exhortation, and exhibited captivating specimens of what had hitherto been rarely heard in Scotland, the polished, well-compact, and regular didactic oration.

In consequence of a call from the Town Council and General Session of Edinburgh, he was translated from the Canongate to Lady Yester's, one of the city churches, on the 11th of October, 1754: and on the 15th day of June, 1758, he was promoted to the High Church of Edinburgh, the most important ecclesiastical charge in the kingdom. To this charge he was raised at the request of the Lords of Council and Session, and of the other distinguished official characters who have their seats in that church. And the uniform prudence, ability, and success which, for a period of more than forty years, accompanied all his ministerial labours in that conspicuous and difficult station, sufficiently evince the wisdom of their choice.

Hitherto his attention seems to have been devoted almost exclusively to the attainment of professional excellence; and to the regular discharge of his parochial duties. No production of his pen had yet been given to the world by himself, except two sermons preached on particular occasions, some translations, in verse, of passages of Scripture for the Psalmody of the Church, and a few articles in the Edinburgh Review; a publication begun in 1755, and conducted for a short time by some of the ablest men in the kingdom. But standing as he now did at the head of his profession, and released by the labour of former years from the drudgery of weekly preparation for the pulpit, he began to think seriously on a plan for teaching to others that art which had contributed so much to the establishment of his own fame. With this view, he communicated to his friends a scheme of Lectures on Composition; and, having obtained the approbation of the University, he began to read them in the College on the 11th of December, 1759. To this undertaking he brought all the qualifications requisite for executing it well; and along with them a weight of reputation, which could not fail to give effect to the lessons he should deliver. For, besides the testimony given to his talents by his successive promotions in the Church, the University of St. Andrews, moved chiefly by the merit of his eloquence, had, in June, 1757;

conferred on him the degree of D. D. a literary honour which, at that time, was very rare in Scotland. Accordingly, his first Course of Lectures was well attended, and received with great applause. The patrons of the University, convinced that they would form a valuable addition to the system of education, agreed in the following summer to institute a rhetorical class, under his direction, as a permanent part of their academical establishment: and, on the 7th of April, 1762, His Majesty was graciously pleased "To erect and endow a " Professorship of Rhetoric and Belles Lettres in the University of " Edinburgh, and to appoint Dr. Blair, in consideration of his approved qualifications, Regius Professor thereof, with a salary of " 70%." These Lectures he published in 1783, when he retired from the labours of the office; and the general voice of the Public has pronounced them to be a most judicious, elegant, and comprehensive system of rules for forming the style and cultivating the taste of youth.

About the time in which he was occupied in laying the foundations of this useful institution, he had an opportunity of conferring another important obligation on the literary world, by the part which he acted in rescuing from oblivion the poems of Ossian. It was by the solicitation of Dr. Blair and Mr. John Home, that Mr. Macpherson was induced to publish his *Fragments of Ancient Poetry*; and their patronage was of essential service in procuring the subscription which enabled him to undertake his tour through the Highlands for collecting the materials of Fingal, and of those other delightful productions which bear the name of Ossian. To these productions Dr. Blair applied the test of genuine criticism, and soon after their publication gave an estimate of their merits in a *Dissertation*, which, for beauty of language, delicacy of taste, and acuteness of critical investigation, has few parallels. It was printed in 1763, and spread the reputation of its author throughout Europe.

The great objects of his literary ambition being now attained, his talents were for many years consecrated solely to the important and peculiar employments of his station. It was not till the year 1777 that he could be induced to favour the world with a volume of the Sermons which had so long furnished instruction and delight to his own congregation. But this volume being well received, the public approbation encouraged him to proceed: three other volumes followed at different intervals; and all of them experienced a degree of success of which few publications can boast. They circulated rapidly and widely wherever the English tongue extends; they were soon translated into almost all the languages of Europe; and His present Majesty, with that wise attention to the interests of religion and literature which distinguishes his reign, was graciously pleased to judge them worthy of a public reward. By a royal mandate to the Exchequer in Scotland, dated July 25th, 1780, a pension of 200*l.* a year was conferred on their author, which continued unaltered till his death.

The motives which gave rise to the fifth volume * are sufficiently

* This Life was originally annexed to the fifth and last volume.

explained by himself in his Address to the Reader. The Sermons which it contains were composed at very different periods of his life; but they were all written out anew in his own hand, and in many parts re-composed, during the course of last summer, after he had completed his eighty-second year. They were delivered to the publishers about six weeks before his death, in the form and order in which they now appear. And it may gratify his readers to know, that the last of them which he composed, though not the last in the order adopted for publication, was the Sermon on *A Life of Dissipation and Pleasure* — a sermon written with great dignity and eloquence, and which should be regarded as his solemn parting admonition to a class of men, whose conduct is highly important to the community, and whose reformation and virtue he had long laboured most zealously to promote.

The Sermons which he has given to the world are universally admitted to be models in their kind; and they will long remain durable monuments of the piety, the genius, and sound judgment of their author. But they formed only a small part of the Discourses he prepared for the pulpit. The remainder, modesty led him to think unfit for the press; and, influenced by an excusable solicitude for his reputation, he left behind him an explicit injunction that his numerous manuscripts should be destroyed. The greatness of their number was creditable to his professional character, and exhibited a convincing proof that his fame as a public teacher had been honourably purchased, by the most unwearied application to the private and unseen labours of his office. It rested on the uniform intrinsic excellence of his Discourses, in point of matter and composition, rather than on foreign attractions; for his delivery, though distinct, serious, and impressive, was not remarkably distinguished by that magic charm of voice and action which captivates the senses and imagination, and which, in the estimation of superficial hearers, constitutes the chief merit of a preacher.

In that department of his professional duty, which regarded the government of the church, Dr. Blair was steadily attached to the cause of moderation. From diffidence, and perhaps from a certain degree of inaptitude for extemporaneous speaking, he took a less public part in the contests of ecclesiastical politics than some of his contemporaries; and, from the same causes, he never would consent to become Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland. But his influence among his brethren was extensive: his opinion, guided by that sound uprightness of judgment, which formed the predominant feature of his intellectual character, had been always held in high respect by the friends with whom he acted; and, for many of the last years of his life, it was received by them almost as a law. The great leading principle in which they cordially concurred with him, and which directed all their measures, was to preserve the church, on the one side, from a slavish, corrupting dependence on the civil power; and, on the other, from a greater infusion of democratical influence than is compatible with good order, and the established constitution of the country.

The reputation which he acquired in the discharge of his public duties, was well sustained by the great respectability of his private character. Deriving from family associations a strong sense of clerical decorum, feeling on his heart deep impressions of religious and moral obligation, and guided in his intercourse with the world by the same correct and delicate taste which appeared in his writings, he was eminently distinguished through life by the prudence, purity, and dignified propriety of his conduct. His mind, by constitution and culture, was admirably formed for enjoying happiness. Well-balanced in itself by the nice proportion and adjustment of its faculties, it did not incline him to any of those eccentricities, either of opinion or of action, which are too often the lot of genius:—free from all tincture of envy, it delighted cordially in the prosperity and fame of his companions: sensible to the estimation in which he himself was held, it disposed him to dwell at times on the thought of his success with a satisfaction which he did not affect to conceal: inaccessible alike to gloomy and to peevish impressions, it was always master of its own movements, and ready, in an uncommon degree, to take an active and pleasing interest in every thing, whether important or trifling, that happened to become for the moment the object of his attention. This habit of mind, tempered with the most unsuspecting simplicity, and united to eminent talents and inflexible integrity, while it secured to the last his own relish of life, was wonderfully calculated to endear him to his friends, and to render him an invaluable member of any society to which he belonged. Accordingly there have been few men more universally respected by those who knew him, more sincerely esteemed in the circle of his acquaintance, or more tenderly beloved by those who enjoyed the blessings of his private and domestic connexion.

In April, 1748, he married his cousin Katharine Bannatine, daughter of the Rev. James Bannatine, one of the ministers of Edinburgh. By her he had a son who died in infancy, and a daughter, who lived to her twenty-first year, the pride of her parents, and adorned with all the accomplishments that became her age and sex. Mrs. Blair herself, a woman of great good sense and spirit, was also taken from him a few years before his death, after she had shared with the tenderest affection in all his fortunes, and contributed near half a century to his happiness and comfort.

Dr. Blair had been naturally of a feeble constitution of body; but as he grew up, his constitution acquired greater firmness and vigour. Though liable to occasional attacks from some of the sharpest and most painful diseases that afflict the human frame, he enjoyed a general state of good health; and, through habitual cheerfulness, temperance, and care, survived the usual term of human life.—For some years he had felt himself unequal to the fatigue of instructing his very large congregation from the pulpit; and, under the impression which this feeling produced, he has been heard at times to say with a sigh, “that he was left almost the last of his contemporaries.” Yet he continued to the end in the regular discharge of all his other official duties, and particularly in giving advice to the afflicted, who,

from different quarters of the kingdom, solicited his correspondence. His last summer was devoted to the preparation of the fifth volume of his Sermons; and, in the course of it, he exhibited a vigour of understanding and capacity of exertion equal to that of his best days. He began the winter, pleased with himself on account of the completion of this work; and his friends were flattered with the hope that he might live to enjoy the accession of eminence and fame which he expected it would bring. But the seeds of a mortal disease were lurking unperceived within him. On the 24th of December, 1800, he complained of a pain in his bowels, which, during that and the following day, gave him but little uneasiness; and he received as usual the visits of his friends. On the afternoon of the 26th, the symptoms became violent and alarming:—he felt that he was approaching the end of his appointed course: and retaining to the last moment the full possession of his mental faculties, he expired on the morning of the 27th, with the composure and hope which become a Christian pastor.

The lamentation for his death was universal and deep through the city which he had so long instructed and adorned. Its Magistrates, participating in the general grief, appointed his church to be put in mourning; and his colleague in it, the writer of this Narrative, who had often experienced the inestimable value of his counsel and friendship, delivered on the Sabbath after his funeral a discourse to his congregation, with an extract from which this account shall be closed. It is inserted here at the particular request of that very respectable body of men who composed his Kirk Session, and who, by their public approbation of this tribute to his memory, are desirous of transmitting, with his Sermons, to posterity a memorial of the veneration and esteem with which his conduct had inspired them.—After exhorting to contemplate and follow the patriarchs and saints of former ages, *who, through faith and patience, inherit the promises*, the Preacher thus proceeded:—

“ In this competition for virtuous attainment it may be often useful
 “ to bring down your eye, from contemplating the departed worthies
 “ of distant times and countries, towards patterns of imitation that
 “ are endeared to you by more tender ties. If, in the relations of life,
 “ you have had a connexion,—if, in the circle of your own family,
 “ you have had a father, a husband, or a brother, who discharged
 “ with exemplary fidelity the duties of his station, whom every tongue
 “ blessed as the friend of God and man, who died as he lived, full
 “ of faith and hope, place him before you as the model of your
 “ conduct,—conceive him bending from his seat in the skies,
 “ pleased with your attachment, deeply interested in your success,
 “ and cheering you in your labours of love. His image will be as
 “ a guardian angel, to admonish you when dangers approach, to
 “ rouse within you every principle of virtuous exertion, and to
 “ inspire you with strength to overcome.

“ Our hearts, Christians, have been deeply pierced with the loss
 “ of a most valuable connexion, of a venerable pastor, who watched
 “ long for our souls, and, with the most unwearied fidelity, pointed

“out to us the path of happiness. To you, and to the general interests of pure religion, he was attached by many powerful obligations. A native of this city, and descended from a family which, in former times, had given several bright ornaments to the Church of Scotland, he felt the warmest tendencies of nature co-operating with the principles of duty, to call forth all his powers in the sacred service to which he was devoted. And, by the blessing of God on his industry, he rose to an eminence in professional merit, which has reflected distinguished honour on the city, on the church, and on the country which produced him.

“It was the fortune of Dr. Blair to appear at a period when the literature of his country was just beginning to receive polish and an useful direction; and when it was emulously cultivated by a bright constellation of young men who were destined to carry it to high perfection. In concert with them he applied himself with diligence and assiduity to all those branches of study which could contribute to form him for the eloquence of the pulpit. This was the department in which he chose to excel; to which all the force of his genius was directed; and in which he soon felt that his efforts were to be successful. For from the very commencement of his theological studies, he gave presages of his future attainments; and, in the societies of his youthful companions, laid the foundations of that splendid reputation which, through a long life of meritorious service, continued to increase; and which has procured for him, as a religious instructor, access to the understandings and the hearts of all the most cultivated inhabitants of the Christian world.

“To you, my brethren, who have long enjoyed the inestimable blessing of his immediate instruction, it will not be necessary to describe the qualities of that luminous, fascinating eloquence, with which he was accustomed to warm, and ravish, and amend your hearts. You may have heard others who equalled, or even excelled him in some of the requisites of pulpit oratory, in occasional profoundness of thought, in vivid flashes of imagination, or in pathetic addresses to the heart. But there never was a public teacher in whom all these requisites were combined in juster proportions, placed under the direction of a more exquisite sense of propriety, and employed with more uniform success to convey useful and practical instruction. Standing on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, he exhibited the doctrines of Christ in their genuine purity, separated from the dross of superstition, and traced with inimitable elegance, through all their beneficial influence on the consolation, on the order, and on the virtue both of public and private life. Hence his discourses, uniting in the most perfect form the attractions of utility and beauty, gave a new and better tone to the style of instruction from the pulpit; and contributed in a remarkable degree to correct and refine the religious, the moral, and the literary taste of the times in which he lived.

“The universal admiration which attended his ministerial labours,

“ was some recompence to him for the exertions they had cost. But his chief recompence arose from the consciousness of having contributed so eminently to edify the Church of Christ, and from the improving influence which his labours had shed on his own heart. For he was, at home and in himself, the perfect image of that meekness, simplicity, gentleness, and contentment, which his writings recommend. He was long happy in his domestic relations; and, though doomed at last to feel, through their loss in succession, the heaviest strokes of affliction; yet his mind, fortified by religious habits, and buoyed up by his native tendency to contentment, sustained itself on God, and enabled him to persevere to the end in the active and cheerful discharge of the duties of his station; preparing for the world the blessings of elegant instruction; tendering to the mourner the lessons of divine consolation; guiding the young by his counsels; aiding the meritorious with his influence; and supporting, by his voice, and by his conduct, the civil and ecclesiastical institutions of his Country.

“ With such dispositions and habits it was natural that he should enjoy a distinguished portion of felicity. And perhaps there never was a man who experienced more completely, that *the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and that all her paths are peace*. His Country was proud of his merits, and at different times conferred on him, through the hands of the Sovereign, the most honourable and substantial proofs of her approbation: foreign lands learned from him the way of salvation: he saw marks of deference and respect wherever he appeared: and he felt within himself the gratulations of a good conscience, and the hope of immortality. It was peculiarly delightful to see him in the latest period of his life, at the venerable age of eighty-two, looking back on almost three-score years spent in the public service of his God, pleased with the recollections which it gave, possessing a mind still vigorous and clear, the delight of his friends, sensible to the attentions which they paid to him, burning with zeal for the good of the Church, and, with all the ardour of youthful ambition, preparing the materials of a new claim to the gratitude and admiration of posterity. In this active state of preparation, with the lamp of life still clear and bright, he was found by the Great Lord of all when he came to say, ‘It is enough;’ and, after a single night of pain, to call him gently to his rest.

“ He has gone to give an account of his stewardship.—The Church mourns in him the loss of her brightest ornament.—Let us submit to the stroke with resignation and reverence; and as the most acceptable proof of respect to his memory, let us learn to practise the lessons which he taught.”

J. FINLAYSON.

SERMON I.

ON THE UNION OF PIETY AND MORALITY.

ACTS, x. 4.

Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

THE High and Lofly One who inhabiteth eternity, dwelleth also with him that is of humble and contrite heart. In the midst of his glory, the Almighty is not inattentive to the meanest of his subjects. Neither obscurity of station, nor imperfection of knowledge, sinks those below his regard, who worship and obey him. Every prayer which they send up from their secret retirements, is listened to by him; and every work of charity which they perform, how unknown soever to the world, attracts his notice. The text presents a signal instance of this comfortable truth. In the city of Cæsarea, there dwelt a Roman centurion, a military officer of inferior rank, a Gentile, neither by birth nor religion entitled to the privileges of the Jewish nation. But he was a devout and a benevolent man; who, according to his measure of religious knowledge, studied to perform his duty, *prayed to God always, and gave much alms to the people.* Such a character passed not unobserved by God. So highly was it honoured, that to this good centurion an Angel was sent from heaven, in order to direct him to the means of full instruction in the truth. The Angel accosts him with this salutation, *Cornelius, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.*

It is to the conjunction of *prayers and alms*, that I purpose now to direct your thoughts, as describing the respectable and amiable character of a man, as forming the honour and the blessedness of a true Christian; piety joined with charity, faith with good works, devotion with morality. These are things which God hath connected, and which it is impious in man to separate. It is only when they remain united, that they can come up as a grateful *memorial before God.* I shall first endeavour to shew you, That alms without prayers, or prayers without alms, morality without devotion, or devotion without morality, are extremely defective; and then shall point out the happy effects of their mutual union.

LET us begin with considering the case of alms without prayers; that is, of good works without piety, or a proper sense of God and religion. Examples of this are not uncommon in the world. With many, Virtue is, or at least is pretended to be, a respectable and an honoured name; while Piety sounds meanly in their ears. They are men of the world, and they claim to be men of honour. They rest upon their humanity, their public spirit, their probity, and their truth. They arrogate to themselves all the manly and the active virtues. But devout affections, and religious duties, they treat with contempt, as founded on shadowy speculations, and fit to employ the attention only of weak and superstitious minds. Now, in oppo-

sition to such persons, I contend, That this neglect of piety argues depravity of heart; and that it infers an irregular discharge of the duties of morality.

FIRST, it argues internal depravity; for it discovers a cold and a hard heart. If there be any impression which man is formed by nature to receive, it is a sense of religion. As soon as his mind opens to observation and reflection, he discerns innumerable marks of his dependent state. He finds himself placed by some superior power, in a vast world, where the wisdom and goodness of the Creator are conspicuous on every side. The magnificence, the beauty and order of nature, excite him to admire and adore. When he looks up to that omnipotent hand which operates throughout the universe, he is impressed with reverence. When he receives blessings which he cannot avoid ascribing to divine goodness, he is prompted to gratitude. The expressions of those affections, under the various forms of religious worship, are no other than native effusions of the human heart. Ignorance may mislead, and superstition may corrupt them; but their origin is derived from sentiments that are essential to man.

Cast your eyes over the whole earth. Explore the most remote quarters of the east or the west. You may discover tribes of men without policy, or laws, or cities, or any of the arts of life: But no where will you find them without some form of religion. In every region you behold the prostrate worshipper, the temple, the altar, and the offering. Wherever men have existed, they have been sensible that some acknowledgment was due, on their part, to the Sovereign of the world. If, in their rudest and most ignorant state, this obligation has been felt, what additional force must it acquire by the improvements of human knowledge, but especially by the great discoveries of the Christian revelation? Whatever, either from reverence or from gratitude, can excite men to the worship of God, is by this revelation placed in such a light, as one should think were sufficient to overawe the most thoughtless, and to melt the most obdurate mind.

Canst thou, then, pretend to be a man of reason, nay, a man of virtue, and yet continue regardless of one of the first and chief dictates of human nature? Where is thy sensibility to what is right and fit, if that loud voice, which calls all nations throughout the earth to religious homage, has never been heard, by thee? Or, if it has been heard, by what strange and false refinements hast thou stifled those natural sentiments which it tends to awaken? Calling thyself a son, a citizen, a friend; claiming to be faithful and affectionate in these relations; hast thou no sense of what thou owest to thy first Parent, thy highest Sovereign, thy greatest Benefactor? Can it be consistent with true virtue or honour, to value thyself upon thy regard to inferior obligations, and yet to violate that which is the most sacred and the most ancient of all? When simple instinct teaches the Tartar and the Indian, together with his alms and good works, to join his prayers to that Power whom he considers as the source of good, shall it be no reproach, in the most enlightened state of human nature, and under the purest dispensation of religion, to have extin-

guished the sense of gratitude to Heaven, and to slight all acknowledgment of the great and the true God? What does such conduct imply, but either an entire want, or a wilful suppression, of some of the best and most generous affections belonging to human nature? — Surely, there must be an essential defect in that heart which remains cold and insensible, where it ought to be affected most warmly. Surely, such a degree of depravity must be lodged there, as is sufficient to taint all the other springs of pretended virtue.

BUT, besides this, I must contend, in the second place, That where religion is neglected, there can be no regular nor steady practice of the duties of morality. The character will be often inconsistent: and Virtue, placed on a basis too narrow to support it, will be always loose and tottering. For such is the propensity of our nature to vice, so numerous are the temptations to a relaxed and immoral conduct, that stronger restraints than those of mere reason, are necessary to be imposed on man. The sense of right and wrong, the principle of honour, or the instinct of benevolence, are barriers too feeble to withstand the strength of passion. In the tranquil seasons of life, these natural principles may, perhaps, carry on the ordinary course of social duties with some regularity. But wait until some trying emergence come. Let the conflict of passions arise. Let the heart be either wounded by sore distress, or agitated by violent emotions; and you shall presently see that virtue without religion is inadequate to the government of life. It is destitute of its proper guard, of its firmest support, of its chief encouragement. It will sink under the weight of misfortune; or will yield to the solicitation of guilt.

The great motives that produce constancy and firmness of action, must be of a palpable and striking kind. A divine Legislator, uttering his voice from heaven; an omniscient Witness, beholding us in all our retreats; an Almighty Governor, stretching forth his arm to punish or reward, disclosing the secrets of the invisible world, informing us of perpetual rest prepared hereafter for the righteous, and of *indignation and wrath* awaiting the wicked: these are the considerations which overawe the world, which support integrity, and check guilt. They add to virtue that solemnity which should ever characterize it. To the admonitions of conscience they give the authority of a law. Co-operating with all the good dispositions of a pious man, they strengthen and insure their influence. On his alms you can have no certain dependence, who thinks not of God, nor has joined prayer to his charitable deeds. But when humanity is seconded by piety, the spring from which it flows is rendered, of course, more regular and constant. — In short, withdraw religion, and you shake all the pillars of morality. In every heart you weaken the influence of virtue: And among the multitude, the bulk of mankind, you overthrow its power.

HAVING thus shown that morality without devotion is both defective and unstable, I proceed to consider the other extreme, of prayers without alms, devotion without morality.

In every age the practice has prevailed, of substituting certain appearances of piety in the place of the great duties of humanity and mercy. Too many there have always been, who flatter themselves

with the hope of obtaining the friendship of their Creator, though they neglect to do justice to their fellow-creatures. But such persons may be assured, that their supposed piety is altogether of a spurious kind. It is an invention of their own, unknown to reason, unknown in the word of God. In scripture we are ever directed to try our faith by our works, our love of God by our love of men. We are directed to consider piety as a principle which regenerates the heart, and forms it to goodness. We are taught, that in vain we address any acts of homage to Christ, unless we *do the things which he saith* ;* and that *love, peace, gentleness, goodness, meekness, and temperance*, are not only the injunctions of his law, but the native *fruits of his spirit*.† If, therefore, while piety seems ardent, morality shall decline, you have full reason to believe, that into that piety some corrupting ingredients have entered. And if ever your regard to morality shall totally fail ; if, while you make many prayers, you give no alms ; if, while you appear to be zealous for God, you are false or unjust to men ; if you are hard or contracted in heart, severe in your censures, and oppressive in your conduct ; then conclude with certainty, that what you had termed piety was no more than an empty name. For as soon, according to the scripture similitude, will *bitter waters flow from a sweet fountain*, as such effects be produced by genuine piety.

What you have called by that name, resolves itself into one or other of three things. Either it is a hypocritical form of godliness, assumed in order to impose on the world ; or, which is the most favourable supposition, it is a transient impression of seriousness, an accidental melting of the heart, which *passes away like the morning cloud and the early dew* ; or, which I am afraid is too often the case, it is the deliberate refuge of a deluded and superstitious, but, at the same time, a corrupted mind. For all men, even the most depraved, are subject, more or less, to compunctions of conscience. It has never been in their power to withdraw totally beyond the reach of that warning voice, which tells them that something is necessary to be done, in order to make their peace with the Ruler of the world. But, backward at the same time to resign the gains of dishonesty, or the pleasures of vice ; averse from submission to that sacred law which enjoins righteousness in its whole extent, they have often attempted to make a sort of composition with Heaven ; a composition, which, though they dare not avow it in words, lurks in secret at the bottom of many a heart. If God will only dispense with some articles of obedience, they will repay him with abundant homage. If they fail in good practice, they will study to be sound in belief ; and, by the number of their prayers, will atone, in some measure, for their deficiency in charitable deeds.

But the attempt is as vain as it is impious. From the simplest and plainest principles of reason it must appear, that religious worship, disjoined from justice and virtue, can upon no account whatever find acceptance with the Supreme Being. *To what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto me ? saith the Lord. Bring no more vain oblations. Incense is an abomination unto me. The new moons and sabbaths, the*

* Luke, v. 46.

† Gal. v. 22.

*calling of assemblies, I cannot away with ; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting.**—Cease, foolish and impious man ! cease to consider the Almighty as a weak or vain-glorious being, who is to be appeased by thy devout prostrations, and thy humble words ; or to be gratified by the parade and ostentation of external worship. What is all thy worship to him ? *Will he eat the flesh of thy sacrifices, or drink the blood of offered goats ?* Was worship required of thee, dost thou think, upon his account, that thou mightest bring an increase to his glory and felicity by thy weak and insignificant praises ? Sooner mightest thou increase the splendour of the sun by a lighted taper, or add to the thunder by thy voice. No : It is for the sake of man, not of God, that worship and prayers are required ; not that God may be rendered more glorious, but that man may be made better ; that he may be confirmed in a proper sense of his dependent state, and acquire those pious and virtuous dispositions in which his highest improvement consists.

Of all the principles in religion, one should take this to be the most evident ; and yet frequent admonitions are needed, to renew the impression of it upon mankind. For what purpose did thy Creator place thee in this world, in the midst of human society, but that as a man among men thou mightest cultivate humanity ; that each in his place might contribute to the general welfare ; that, as a spouse, a brother, a son, or a friend, thou mightest act thy part with an upright and a tender heart ; and thus aspire to resemble Him who ever consults the good of his creatures, and whose *tender mercies are over all his works ?* And darrest thou, who hast been sacrificing unsuspecting innocence to thy loose pleasures ; thou, who hast been disturbing the repose of society by thine ambition or craft ; thou, who, to increase thy treasures, hast been making the widow and the orphan weep ; darrest thou approach God with thy worship and thy prayers, and entertain the hope that he will look down upon thee in peace ? Will the God of order and justice accept such poor compensation for his violated laws ? Will the God of love regard the services of one who is an enemy to his creatures ? Shall a corrupter of the society of men aspire to the habitations of pure and blessed spirits ?—Believe it, *He that saith he loveth God, must love his brother also. Cease to do evil, learn to do well. Seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow :* And then, *Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to thee ; call upon him in the day of trouble, and he will answer thee.* Thy prayers and thine alms shall then ascend in joint memorial before the Most High.

I have now shown the evil of maiming and splitting religion ; of dividing asunder two things, which, though in theory they may be separated, yet in practice must always co-exist, if either of them be real ; Devotion to God, and Charity to men. Let us consider next the happy effects of their union.

Their union forms the consistent, the graceful, the respectable character of the real Christian, the man of true worth. If you leave either of them out of your system, even though you excel in the other,

* Isaiah, i. 11. 13.

you can stand trial only in one point of view. It is only on one side, your character is fair; on the other, it will always be open to much reproach. And as you dishonour yourselves, so you do great injustice to religion. For, by dividing its parts from one another, you never fail to expose it to the censure of the world: and, perhaps, by this sort of partial and divided goodness, religion has suffered more in the esteem of mankind, than by open profligacy. The unbeliever will scoff at your piety, when he sees you negligent of moral duties. The bigot will decry all morality, when he sees you pretending to be a follower of virtue, though you be a despiser of God. Whereas he who fears God, and is at the same time just and beneficent to men, exhibits religion to the world with full propriety. It shines in his conduct with its native splendour; and its rays throw a glory round him. His character is above reproach. It is at once amiable and venerable. Malice itself is afraid to attack him; and even the worst men respect and honour him in their hearts.

This, too, is the man whose life will be most peaceful and happy. He who fails materially either in piety or in virtue, is always obnoxious to the anguish of remorse. His partial goodness may flatter him in the day of superficial observation; but when solitude or distress awakens the powers of reflection, he shall be made to feel, that one part of duty performed, atones not for another which is neglected. In the midst of his prayers, the remembrance of injustice will upbraid him with hypocrisy; and in the distribution of his alms, the prayers which the poor put up for him, will make him blush for his neglect of God. Conscience will supply the place of the hand coming forth to write over against him on the wall, *Thou art weighed in the balance, and art found wanting.** Whereas he who holds both faith and a good conscience, who attends equally to the discharge of his duty towards God and towards man, enjoys, as far as human imperfection allows, the sense of fairness and consistency in conduct, of integrity and soundness of heart.

The man of mere morality is a stranger to all the delicate and refined pleasures of devotion. In works of beneficence and mercy, he may enjoy satisfaction. But his satisfaction is destitute of that glow of affection, which enlivens the feelings of one who lifts his heart at the same time to the Father of the universe, and considers himself as imitating God. The man again who rests solely in devotion, if that devotion open not his heart to humanity, not only remains a stranger to the pleasures of beneficence, but must often undergo the pain arising from bad passions. But when beneficence and devotion are united, they pour upon the man in whom they meet, the full pleasures of a good and pure heart. His alms connected him with men; his prayers with God. He looks without dismay on both worlds. All nature has to him a benign aspect. If engaged in active life, he is the friend of men; and he is happy in the exertions of that friendship. If left in retirement, he walks among the works of nature, as with God. Every object is enlivened to him by the sense of the Divine presence. Every where he traces the beneficent hand of the

Author of nature; and every where, with glowing heart, he hears and answers his secret voice. When he looks up to heaven, he rejoices in the thought, that there dwells that God, whom he serves and honours; that Saviour in whom he trusts; that Spirit of grace from whose inspiration his piety and his charity flow. When he looks around him on the world, he is soothed with the pleasing remembrance of good offices which he has done, or at least has studied to do, to many who dwell there. How comfortable the reflection, that him no poor man can upbraid for having withheld his due; him no unfortunate man can reproach for having seen and despised, his sorrows; but that on his head are descending the prayers of the needy and the aged; and that the hands of those whom his protection has supported, or his bounty has fed, are lifted up in secret to bless him!

Life, passed under the influence of such dispositions, naturally leads to a happy end. It is not enough to say, that faith and piety, joined with active virtue, constitute the requisite preparation for heaven. They in truth begin the enjoyment of heaven. In every state of our existence, they form the chief ingredients of felicity. Hence they are the great marks of Christian regeneration. They are the signature of that Holy Spirit, by which good men are said to be *sealed unto the day of redemption*. The text affords a striking proof of the estimation in which they are held by God. Amidst that infinite variety of human events which pass under his eye, the prayers and the alms of Cornelius attracted his particular notice. He remarked the amiable dispositions which rose in the heart of this good man. But he saw that they were yet imperfect, while he remained unenlightened by the principles of the Christian religion. In order to remove this obstruction to his rising grades, and to bring him to the full knowledge of that God whom he sought to honour, he was favoured with a supernatural message from heaven. While the princes of the earth were left to act by the counsels of their own wisdom; while, without interposition from above, generals conquered or fell, according to the vicissitude of human things; to this good centurion an angel was commissioned from the throne of God.

What can I say more or higher in praise of this blessed character, than that it is what God delights to honour? Men single out, as the objects of distinction, the great, the brave, or the renowned. But he *who seeth not as man seeth*, passing by those qualities which often shine with false splendour to human observation, looks to the inward principles of action; to those principles which form the essence of a worthy character, and which, if called forth, would give birth to whatever is laudable or excellent in conduct. Is there one, though in humble station, or obscure life, who *feareth God, and worketh righteousness*; whose prayers and alms, proceeding in regular unaffected tenour, bespeak the upright, the tender, the devout heart? Those alms and prayers come up in memorial before that God who is *no respecter of persons*. The Almighty beholds him from his throne with complacency. Divine illumination is ready to instruct him. Angels minister to him. They now mark him out on earth as their

future associate; and for him they make ready in paradise, *the white robes, the palms, and the sceptres* of the just.

To this honour, to this blessedness, let our hearts continually aspire; and throughout the whole of life, let those solemn and sacred words with which I conclude, sound in our ears, and be the great directory of our conduct: *He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord thy God require of thee, but — to do justly and love mercy — and to walk humbly with thy God?**

SERMON II.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION UPON ADVERSITY.

PSALM xxvii. 5.

In the time of trouble, he shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; he shall set me upon a rock.

THE life of man has always been a very mixed state, full of uncertainty and vicissitude, of anxieties and fears. In every religious audience, there are many who fall under the denomination of the unfortunate; and the rest are ignorant how soon they may be called to join them. For the prosperity of no man on earth is stable and assured. Dark clouds may soon gather over the heads of those whose sky is now most bright. In the midst of the deceitful calm which they enjoy, the storm that is to overwhelm them has perhaps already begun to ferment. *If a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.†*

Hence, to a thoughtful mind, no study can appear more important than how to be suitably prepared for the misfortunes of life; so as to contemplate them in prospect without dismay, and, if they must befall, to bear them without dejection. Throughout every age, the wisdom of the wise, the treasures of the rich, and the power of the mighty, have been employed, either in guarding their state against the approach of distress, or in rendering themselves less vulnerable by its attacks. Power has endeavoured to remove adversity to a distance; Philosophy has studied, when it drew nigh, to conquer it by patience; and Wealth has sought out every pleasure that can compensate or alleviate pain.

While the wisdom of the world is thus occupied, religion has been no less attentive to the same important object. It informs us in the text, of a *pavilion*, which God erects to shelter his servants *in the time of trouble*; of a *secret place in his tabernacle*, into which he brings them; of a *rock on which he sets them up*; and elsewhere he tells us, of a *shield and a buckler*, which he spreads before them, *to cover them from the terror by night, and the arrow that flieth by day*. Now of what nature are those instruments of defence, which God is repre-

* Micah, vi. 8.

† Eccles. xi. 8.

sented as providing with such solicitous care for those who fear him? Has he reared up any bulwarks, impregnable by misfortune, in order to separate the pious and virtuous from the rest of mankind, and to screen them from the common disasters of life? No: To those disasters we behold them liable no less than others. The defence which religion provides is altogether of an internal kind. It is the heart, not the outward state, which it professes to guard. When the *time of trouble* comes, as come it must to all, it places good men under the *protection* of the Almighty, by affording them that security and peace which arise from the belief of Divine protection. It brings them into the *sanctuary of his tabernacle*, by opening to them sources of consolation which are hidden from others. By that strength of mind with which it endows them, *it sets them up upon a rock*, against which the tempest may violently beat, but which it cannot shake.

How far the comforts proceeding from religion merit those high titles under which they are here figuratively described, I shall in this discourse endeavour to show. I shall for this end compare together the situation of bad men, and that of the good, when both are suffering the misfortunes of life; and then make such improvement as the subject will naturally suggest.

I. RELIGION prepares the mind for encountering, with fortitude, the most severe shocks of adversity; whereas vice, by its natural influence on the temper, tends to produce dejection under the slightest trials. While worldly men enlarge their possessions, and extend their connexions, they imagine that they are strengthening themselves against all the possible vicissitudes of life. They say in their hearts, *My mountain stands strong, and I shall never be moved*. But so fatal is their delusion, that, instead of strengthening, they are weakening, that which can only support them when those vicissitudes come. It is their mind which must then support them; and their mind, by their sensual attachments, is corrupted and enfeebled. Addicted with intemperate fondness to the pleasures of the world, they incur two great and certain evils; they both exclude themselves from every resource except the world; and they increase their sensibility to every blow which comes upon them from that quarter.

They have neither principles nor temper which can stand the assault of trouble. They have no principles which lead them to look beyond the ordinary rotation of events; and therefore, when misfortunes involve them, the prospect must be comfortless on every side. Their crimes have disqualified them from looking up to the assistance of any higher power than their own ability, or for relying on any better guide than their own wisdom. And as from principle they can derive no support, so in a temper corrupted by prosperity they find no relief. They have lost that moderation of mind which enables a wise man to accommodate himself to his situation. Long fed with false hopes, they are exasperated and stung by every disappointment. Luxurious and effeminate, they can bear no uneasiness. Proud and presumptuous, they can brook no opposition. By nourishing dispositions which so little suit this uncertain state, they have infused a double portion of bitterness into the cup of woe; they have sharpened

the edge of that sword which is lifted up to smite them. Strangers to all the temperate satisfactions of a good and a pure mind; strangers to every pleasure except what was seasoned by vice or vanity, their adversity is to the last degree disconsolate. Health and opulence were the two pillars on which they rested. Shake either of them; and their whole edifice of hope and comfort falls. Prostrate and forlorn, they are left on the ground; obliged to join with the man of Ephraim in his abject lamentation, *They have taken away my gods which I have made, and what have I more?** — Such are the causes to which we must ascribe the broken spirits, the peevish temper, and impatient passions, that so often attend the declining age, or fallen fortunes, of vicious men.

But how different is the condition of a truly good man in those trying situations of life! Religion had gradually prepared his mind for all the events of this inconstant state. It had instructed him in the nature of true happiness. It had early weaned him from the undue love of the world, by discovering to him its vanity, and by setting higher prospects in his view. Afflictions do not attack him by surprise, and therefore do not overwhelm him. He was equipped for the storm, as well as the calm, in this dubious navigation of life. Under those conditions he knew himself to be brought hither, that he was not to retain always the enjoyment of what he loved: And therefore he is not overcome by disappointment, when that which is mortal, dies; when that which is mutable, begins to change; and when that which he knew to be transient, passes away.

All the principles which religion teaches, and all the habits which it forms, are favourable to strength of mind. It will be found, that whatever purifies, fortifies also the heart. In the course of living *righteously, soberly, and godly*, a good man acquires a steady and well-governed spirit. Trained, by Divine grace, to enjoy with moderation the advantages of the world, neither lifted up by success, nor enervated with sensuality, he meets the changes in his lot without humanly dejection. He is inured to temperance and restraint. He has learned firmness and self-command. He is accustomed to look up to that Supreme Providence, which disposes of human affairs, not with reverence only, but with trust and hope.

The time of prosperity was to him not merely a season of barren joy, but productive of much useful improvement. He had cultivated his mind. He had stored it with useful knowledge, with good principles, and virtuous dispositions. These resources remain entire, when the days of trouble come. They remain with him in sickness, as in health; in poverty, as in the midst of riches; in his dark and solitary hours, no less than when surrounded with friends and gay society. From the glare of prosperity he can, without dejection, withdraw into the shade. Excluded from several advantages of the world, he may be obliged to retreat into a narrower circle; but within that circle he will find many comforts left. His chief pleasures were always of the calm, innocent, and temperate kind; and over these the changes of the world have the least power. His mind is a kingdom

* Judges, xviii. 24.

to him ; and he can still enjoy it. The world did not bestow upon him all his enjoyments ; and therefore it is not in the power of the world, by its most cruel attacks, to carry them all away.

II. THE distresses of life are alleviated to good men, by reflections on their past conduct ; while, by such reflections, they are highly aggravated to the bad. During the gay and active periods of life, sinners elude, in some measure, the force of conscience. Carried round in the world of affairs and pleasures ; intent on contrivance, or eager in pursuit ; amused by hope, or elated by enjoyment ; they are sheltered, by that crowd of trifles which surrounds them, from serious thought. But conscience is too great a power to remain always suppressed. There is in every man's life a period when he shall be made to stand forth as a real object to his own view : And when that period comes, woe to him who is galled by the sight ! In the dark and solitary hour of distress, with a mind hurt and sore from some recent wound of fortune, how shall he bear to have his character for the first time disclosed to him, in that humiliating light under which guilt will necessarily present it ? Then the recollection of the past becomes dreadful. It exhibits to him a life thrown away on vanities and follies, or consumed in flagitiousness and sin ; no station properly supported ; no material duties fulfilled. Crimes which once had been easily palliated rise before him in their native deformity. The sense of guilt mixes itself with all that has befallen him. He beholds, or thinks that he beholds, the hand of the God whom he hath offended, openly stretched out against him. — At a season when a man stands most in need of support, how intolerable is the weight of this additional load, aggravating the depression of disease, disappointment, or old age ! How miserable his state, who is condemned to endure at once the pangs of guilt, and the vexations of calamity ! *The spirit of a man may sustain his infirmities ; but a wounded spirit who can bear ?*

Whereas, he who is blessed with a clear conscience, enjoys, in the worst conjunctures of human life, a peace, a dignity, an elevation of mind peculiar to virtue. The testimony of a good conscience is indeed to be always distinguished from that presumptuous boast of innocence, which every good Christian totally disclaims. The better he is, he will be the more humble, and sensible of his failings. But though he acknowledge that he can claim nothing from God upon the footing of desert, yet he can trust in his merciful acceptance through Jesus Christ, according to the terms of the Gospel. He can hope that *his prayers and his alms have come up in memorial before God*. The piety and virtue of his former life were as seeds sown in his prosperous state, of which he reaps the fruits in the season of adversity. The riches, the pleasures, and the friends of the world, may have made *wings to themselves and flown away*. But the improvement which he made of those advantages while they lasted, the temperate spirit with which he enjoyed them, the beneficent actions which he performed, and the good example which he set to others, remain behind. By the memory of these, he enjoys his prosperity a second time in reflection ; and perhaps this second and reflected enjoyment is not inferior to the first. It arrives at a more critical and needful

time. It affords him the high satisfaction of having extracted lasting pleasure from that which is short; and of having fixed that which by its nature was changing. — “If my race be now about to end, I have this comfort, that it has not been run in vain. *I have fought the good fight; I have kept the faith.* My mind has no load. Futurity has no terrors. I have endeavoured to do my duty, and to make my peace with God. I leave the rest to Heaven.” These are the reflections which to the upright make light arise in darkness; reflections which cheer the lonely house of virtuous poverty, and attend the conscientious sufferer into prison or exile; which sooth the complaints of grief, lighten the pressure of old age, and furnish to the bed of sickness, a cordial of more grateful relish, and more sovereign virtue, than any which the world can afford.

Look abroad into life, and you will find the general sense of mankind bearing witness to this important truth, that mind is superior to fortune; that what one feels within, is of much greater importance than all that befalls him without. Let a man be brought into some such severe and trying situation, as fixes the attention of the public on his behaviour. The first question which we put concerning him, is not, What does he suffer? but, How does he bear it? Has he a quiet mind? or, Does he appear to be unhappy within? If we judge him to be composed and firm, resigned to Providence, and supported by conscious integrity, his character rises, and his misery lessens in our view. We esteem and admire, rather than pity him. Recollect what holy men have endured for the sake of conscience, and with what cheerfulness they have suffered. On the other hand, when conscience has concurred with outward misfortunes in distressing the guilty, think of the dreadful consequences which have ensued. How often, upon a reverse of fortune, after abused prosperity, have they madly hurried themselves over that precipice from which there is no return; and, in what nature most abhors, the voluntary extinction of life, have sought relief from that torment of reflection, which was become too great for them to bear?

Never then allow yourselves to imagine, that misfortunes alone form the chief misery of man. None but the guilty are completely miserable. The misgiving and distrust, the accusations and reproaches of their minds, the sense of having drawn down upon their heads the evils which they suffer, and the terrifying expectation of more and worse evils to come; these are the essential ingredients of human misery. They not only whet the edge, but they envenom the darts of affliction, and add poison to the wound. Whereas, when misfortunes assail a good man, they carry no such fatal auxiliaries in their train. They may ruffle the surface of his soul; but there is a strength within, which resists their farther impression. The constitution of his mind is sound. The world can inflict upon it no wounds, but what admit of cure.

III. ALL men, in the time of trouble, can look up to no protector, while good men commit themselves, with trust and hope, to the care of Heaven. The human mind, naturally feeble, is made to feel all its weakness by the pressure of adversity. Dejected with evils which

overpower its strength, it relies no longer on itself. It casts every where around, a wishing, exploring eye, for some shelter to screen, some power to uphold it; and if, when abandoned by the world, it it can find nothing to which it may fly in the room of the world, its state is truly forlorn. Now, whither should the ungodly, in this situation, turn for aid? After having contended with the storms of adverse fortune till their spirits are exhausted, gladly would they retreat at last to the sanctuary of religion. But that sanctuary is shut against them; nay, it is environed with terrors. They behold there, not a Protector to whom they can fly, but a Judge whom they dread; and in those moments when they need his friendship the most, they are reduced to deprecate his wrath. If he once called when they refused, and stretched out his hands when they would not regard, how much reason have they to fear that he will leave them now to eat the fruit of their own ways, and to be filled with their own devices; that he will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear cometh?

But of all the thoughts which can enter into the mind, in the season of distress, the belief of an interest in his favour who rules the world is the most soothing. Every form of religion has afforded to virtuous men some degree of this consolation. But it was reserved for the Christian revelation, to carry it to its highest point. For it is the direct scope of that revelation, to accommodate itself to the circumstances of man, under two main views; as guilty in the sight of God, and as struggling with the evils of the world. Under the former, it discovers to him a Mediator and an atonement; under the latter, it promises him the Spirit of grace and consolation. It is a system of complete relief, extended from our spiritual to our temporal distresses. The same hand which holds out forgiveness to the penitent, and assistance to the frail, dispenses comfort and hope to the afflicted.

It deserves your particular notice, in this view, that there is no character which God more frequently assumes to himself in the sacred writings, than that of the Patron of the distressed. Compassion is that attribute of his nature which he has chosen to place in the greatest variety of lights, on purpose that he might accommodate his majesty to our weakness, and provide a cordial for human griefs. He is the hearer of all prayers; but with particular attention he is represented as listening to the cry of the poor, and regarding the prayer of the destitute.* All his creatures he governs with justice and wisdom; but he takes to himself, in a special manner, the charge of executing judgment for the oppressed, of protecting the stranger, of delivering him who hath no helper, from the hand of the spoiler. For the oppression of the poor, and for the sighing of the needy, will I arise, saith the Lord, to set him in safety from him that puffeth at him. He is the Father of the fatherless, and the Judge of the widows, in his holy habitation. He raiseth them up that are bowed down. He dwelleth with the contrite. He healeth the broken in heart.† For he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust,†

* Psal. cii. 17.

† Ib. cxlvi. 7. — lxxviii. 5. — cxlvii. 3. — ciii. 14, &c.

— If the wisdom of his providence saw it necessary to place so many of his creatures in an afflicted state, that state, however, he commiserates. He disdains not to point out himself as the refuge of the virtuous and pious; and to invite them, amidst all their troubles, to pour out their hearts before him. Those circumstances which estrange others from them, interest him the more in their situation. The neglect or scorn of the world exposes them not to any contempt in his sight. No obscurity conceals them from his notice; and though they should be forgotten by every friend on earth, they are remembered by the God of heaven. That sigh, heaved from the afflicted bosom, which is heard by no human ear, is listened to by him; and that tear is remarked, which falls unnoticed or despised by the world.

Such views of the Supreme Being impart the most sensible consolation to every pious heart. They present his administration under an aspect so mild and benign, as in a great measure to disperse the gloom which hangs over human life. A good man acts with a vigour, and suffers with a patience more than human, when he believes himself countenanced by the Almighty. Injured or oppressed by the world, he looks up to a Judge who will vindicate his cause; he appeals to a Witness who knows his integrity; he commits himself to a Friend who will never forsake him. When tired with the vexations of life, devotion opens to him its quiet retreat, where the tumults of the world are hushed, and its cares are lost in happy oblivion; where *the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest*. There his mind regains its serenity; the agitation of passion is calmed; and a softening balm is infused into the wounds of the spirit. Disclosing to an invisible Friend those secret griefs which he has no encouragement to make known to the world, his heart is lightened. He does not feel himself solitary or forsaken. He believes God to be present with him, and the Holy Ghost to be the inspirer of his consolations. From that *secret place of the Divine tabernacle*, into which the Text represents him as admitted, he hears this voice issue, *Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee. Fear not; for I am with thee. Be not dismayed; for I am thy God. And as he hears a voice which speaks to none but the pure in heart, so he beholds a hand which sinners cannot see. He beholds the hand of Providence conducting all the hidden springs and movements of the universe; and with a secret, but unerring operation, directing every event towards the happiness of the righteous. Those afflictions which appear to others the messengers of the wrath of Heaven, appear to him the ministers of sanctification and wisdom. Where they discern nothing but the horrors of the tempest which surrounds them, his more enlightened eye beholds the angel who rides in the whirlwind, and directs the storm. Hence a *peace keeping the mind and heart*, which is no where to be found but under the *pavilion of the Almighty*.*

IV. Good men are comforted under their troubles by the hope of Heaven; while bad men are not only deprived of this hope, but distressed with fears arising from a future state. The soul of man can never divest itself wholly of anxiety about its fate hereafter. There are hours when even to the prosperous, in the midst of their plea-

asures, eternity is an awful thought. But much more when those pleasures, one after another, begin to withdraw; when life alters its forms, and becomes dark and cheerless; when its changes warn the most inconsiderate, that what is so mutable will soon pass entirely away; then with pungent earnestness comes home that question to the heart, Into what world are we next to go? — How miserable the man, who, under the distractions of calamity, hangs doubtful about an event which so nearly concerns him; who, in the midst of doubts and anxieties, approaching to that awful boundary which separates this world from the next, shudders at the dark prospect before him; wishing to exist after death, and yet afraid of that existence; catching at every feeble hope which superstition can afford him, and trembling, in the same moment, from reflection upon his crimes!

But blessed be God who hath brought life and immortality to light: who hath not only brought them to light, but secured them to good men; and, by the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, hath begotten them unto the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that fadeth not away. Justly is this hope styled in Scripture, the anchor of the soul, both sure and stedfast. For what an anchor is to a ship in a dark night, on an unknown coast, and amidst a boisterous ocean, that is this hope to the soul, when distracted by the confusions of the world. In danger, it gives security; amidst general fluctuation, it affords one fixed point of rest. It is, indeed, the most eminent of all the advantages which religion now confers. For, consider the mighty power of hope over the human mind. It is the universal comforter. It is the spring of all human activity. Upon futurity, men are constantly suspended. Animated by the prospect of some distant good, they toil and suffer through the whole course of life, and it is not so much what they are at present, as what they hope to be in some after-time, that enlivens their motions, fixes attention, and stimulates industry. Now, if, in the common affairs of life, such is the energy of hope, even when its object is neither very considerable, nor very certain; what effects may it not be expected to produce, when it rests upon an object so splendid as a life of immortal felicity? Were this hope entertained with that full persuasion which Christian faith demands, it would, in truth, not merely alleviate, but totally annihilate, all human miseries. It would banish discontent, extinguish grief, and suspend the very feeling of pain.

But allowing for the mixture of human frailty; admitting those abatements which our imperfection makes upon the effect of every religious principle, still you will find, that in proportion to the degree in which the hope of heaven operates upon good men, they will be tranquil under sufferings; nay, they will be happy, in comparison of those who enjoy no such relief. What, indeed, in the course of human affairs, is sufficient to distress, far less to overwhelm, the mind of that man who can look down on all human things from an elevation so much above them? He is only a passenger through this world. He is travelling to a happier country. How disagreeable soever the occurrences of his journey may be, yet at every stage of that journey he receives the assurance that he is drawing nearer and nearer to the period

of rest and felicity. — Endure, and thou shalt overcome. Persevere, and thou shalt be successful. The time of trial hastens to a close. Thy mansion is prepared above; thy rest remaineth among the people of God. The disorders which vice has introduced into the works of God, are about to terminate; and all tears are soon to be wiped away from the eyes of the just. — The firm assurance of this happy conclusion to the vexations and the vanities of life, works a greater effect on the sincere illiterate Christian, than all the refinements of philosophy can work on the most learned Infidel. These may gratify the mind that is at ease; may sooth the heart when slightly discomposed; but when it is sore and deeply torn; when bereaved of its best and most beloved comforts, the only consolations that can then find access, arise from the hope of a better world; where those comforts shall be again restored; and all the virtuous shall be assembled, in the presence of him who made them. Such hopes banish that despair which overwhelms, and leave only that tender melancholy which softens the heart, and often renders the whole character more gentle and amiable.

Of this nature are the resources which religion provides for good men. By its previous discipline, it trains them to fortitude; by the reflections of a good conscience it soothes, by the sense of Divine favour it supports them; and when every comfort fails them on earth, it cheers them with the hope of Heaven. Distinguishing his servants with such advantages, God is justly said to erect *his pavilion* over them in the evil time. He not only *spreads a tent for them in the wilderness*, but he transforms in some measure the state of nature around them. To use the beautiful language of ancient prophecy; *In the desert, the thirsty land where no water is, he openeth springs. Instead of the thorn, he maketh the fir-tree to come up; instead of the briar, the myrtle to spring. In the midst of the habitation of dragons, he maketh green pastures rise, and still waters flow around his people.*

THE improvement to be made of these truths is as obvious as it is important. Let us study so to conduct our lives, that we may be qualified for deriving such consolations from religion. To their reality, and their importance, all mankind bear witness. For no sooner are they overtaken by distress, than to religion they fly. This, throughout every age, has been the universal shelter which the young and the old, the high and the low, the giddy and the serious, have sought to gain, as soon as they found that rest could be no where else procured for the weary head, or the aching heart. But amidst those multitudes that crowd to religion for relief, how few are entitled to approach that sacred source of comfort? on what feeble props do their hopes and pretensions rest? How much superstition mingles with that religion to which men are driven by distress and fear? — You must first apply to it as the guide of life, before you can have recourse to it as the refuge of sorrow. You must submit to its legislative authority, and experience its renewing influence, before you can look for its consolatory effect. You must secure the testimony of a good conscience, and peace with God through Jesus Christ; otherwise, *when the floods shall come, and the rains descend,*

and the winds blow, the house which you had proposed for your retreat, shall prove the *house founded on the sand, not on the rock*:

There are two plans, and there are but two, on which any man can propose to conduct himself through the dangers and distresses of human life. The one is the plan of worldly wisdom; the other, that of determined adherence to conscience. He who acts upon the former, lays principle aside, and trusts his defence to his art and ability. He avails himself of every advantage which his knowledge of the world suggests. He attends to nothing but what he considers as his interest; and, unconfined by conscience, pursues it by every course which promises him success. This plan, though too often adopted, will be found, on trial, ineffectual and deceitful. For human ability is an unequal match for the violent and unforeseen vicissitudes of the world. When these torrents rise in their might, they sweep away in a moment the banks which worldly wisdom had reared for defence, and overwhelm alike the crafty and the artless. In the mean time, persons of this character condemn themselves to live a most unquiet life. They pass their days in perpetual anxiety, listening to every motion; startled by every alarm; changing their measures on every new occurrence; and, when distress breaks in over all their defences, they are left under it, hopeless and disconsolate.

The plan, which, in opposition to this, religion recommends, as both more honourable in itself, and more effectual for security, is, at all hazards, to do your duty, and to leave the consequences to God. Let him who would act upon this plan, adopt for the rule of his conduct that maxim of the Psalmist's, *Trust in the Lord, and do good*. * To firm integrity, let him join a humble reliance on God. Let his adherence to duty encourage his religious trust. Let his religious trust inspire him with fortitude in the performance of his duty. Let him know no path but the straight and direct one. In the most critical moments of action, let him ask no farther questions, than, What is the right, the fit, the worthy part? How, as a man, and as a Christian, it becomes him to act? Having received the decision of conscience, let him *commit his way unto the Lord*. Let him, without trepidation or wavering, proceed in discharging his duty; resolved, that though the world may make him unfortunate, it shall never make him base; and confiding, that in what God and his conscience require him to act or suffer, God and a good conscience will support him. — Such principles as these, are the best preparation for the vicissitudes of the human lot. They are the shield of inward peace. He who thinks and acts thus, shall be exposed to no wounds but what religion can cure. He may feel the blows of adversity; but he shall not know the wounds of the heart.

* Psal. cxlvii. 9.

SERMON III.

ON THE INFLUENCE OF RELIGION UPON PROSPERITY.

PSALM i. 3.

He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season : his leaf also shall not wither ; and whatsoever he doth shall prosper.

THE happy influence of religion upon human life, in the time of adversity, has been considered in the preceding discourse. Concerning this the sentiments of men are more generally agreed, than with respect to some other prerogatives which religion claims. They very readily assign to it the office of a Comforter. But as long as their state is prosperous, they are apt to account it an unnecessary guest, perhaps an unwelcome intruder. Let us not be thus unjust to religion, nor confine its importance to one period only in the life of man. It was never intended to be merely the nurse of sickness, and the staff of old age. I purpose now to shew you, That it is no less essential to the enjoyment of prosperity, than to the comfort of adversity : That prosperity is prosperous, if we may be allowed the expression, to a good man only ; and that to every other person, it will prove, notwithstanding its fair appearance, a barren and joyless state.

The Psalmist, in the Text, by an image taken from one of the most beautiful objects in nature, describes a man who flourishes in full prosperity. But to whom is the description limited ? To him, as the preceding verses inform us, *that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in seat of the scornful, but hath his delight in the law of God.* He only is *like the tree planted by the rivers of water* ; whilst the ungodly, as he adds, *are not so* ; but, how prosperous soever they may appear to the world, are in truth but like *the chaff which the wind driveth away.* In confirmation of this doctrine, I shall lay before you some of those circumstances which distinguish the prosperity of the good man beyond that of the sinner ; and shall conclude, with pointing out the dangers and miseries into which the latter is apt to be betrayed by his favourable situation in the world.

I. PIETY, and gratitude to God, contribute in a high degree to enliven prosperity. Gratitude is a pleasing emotion. The sense of being distinguished by the kindness of another, gladdens the heart, warms it with reciprocal affection, and gives to any possession, which is agreeable in itself, a double relish from its being the gift of a friend. Favours conferred by men, and acknowledged, may prove burdensome. For human virtue is never perfect ; and sometimes unreasonable expectations on the one side, sometimes a mortifying sense of dependence on the other, corrode in secret the pleasure of benefits,

and convert the obligations of friendship into grounds of jealousy. But nothing of this kind can effect the intercourse of gratitude with Heaven. Its favours are wholly disinterested; and with a gratitude the most cordial and unsuspicious, a good man looks up to that Almighty Benefactor, who aims at no end but the happiness of those whom he blesses, and who desires no return from them but a devout and thankful heart. While others can trace their prosperity to no higher source than a concurrence of worldly causes, and, often, of mean or trifling incidents, which occasionally favoured their designs; with what superiour satisfaction does the servant of God remark the hand of that gracious Power which hath raised him up; which hath happily conducted him through the various steps of life, and crowned him with the most favourable distinction beyond his equals?

LET us farther consider, that not only gratitude for the past, but a cheering sense of God's favour at the present, enter into the pious emotion. They are only the virtuous, who in their prosperous days hear this voice addressed to them: *Go thy way, eat thy bread with joy, and drink thy wine with a merry heart; for God now accepteth thy works.** He who is the Author of their prosperity, gives them a title to enjoy, with complacency, his own gift. While bad men snatch the pleasures of the world as by stealth, without countenance from God, the proprietor of the world; the righteous sit openly down to the feast of life, under the smile of approving Heaven. No guilty fears damp their joys. The blessing of God rests upon all that they possess; his protection surrounds them; and hence, *in the habitations of the righteous, is found the voice of rejoicing and salvation.* A lustre unknown to others, invests, in their sight, the whole face of nature. Their piety reflects a sunshine from heaven upon the prosperity of the world; unites, in one point of view, the smiling aspect, both of the powers above, and of the objects below. Not only have they as full a relish as others, of the innocent pleasures of life, but, moreover, in these they hold communion with God. In all that is good or fair, they trace his hand. From the beauties of nature, from the improvements of art, from the enjoyments of social life, they raise their affection to the source of all the happiness which surrounds them; and thus widen the sphere of their pleasures, by adding intellectual, and spiritual, to earthly joys.

For illustration of what I have said on this head, remark that cheerful enjoyment of a prosperous state which King David had, when he wrote the twenty-third Psalm; and compare the highest pleasures of the riotous sinner, with the happy and satisfied spirit which breathes throughout that Psalm. — In the midst of the splendour of royalty, with what amiable simplicity of gratitude does he look up to the Lord as *his shepherd*; happier in ascribing all his success to Divine favour, than to the policy of his councils, or to the force of his arms! How many instances of Divine goodness arose before him in pleasing remembrance, when with such relish he speaks of the *green pastures* and *still waters* beside which God had led him; of his *cup which he hath made to overflow*; and of the *table which he*

* Eccles. ix. 7.

hath prepared for him in presence of his enemies! With what perfect tranquillity does he look forward to the time of his passing through *the valley of the shadow of death*; unappalled by that Spectre, whose most distant appearance blasts the prosperity of sinners! He fears no evil, as long as *the rod and the staff* of his Divine Shepherd are with him; and, through all the unknown periods of this and of future existence, commits himself to his guidance with secure and triumphant hope. *Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life; and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.* — What a purified, sentimental enjoyment of prosperity is here exhibited! How different from that gross relish of worldly pleasures, which belongs to those who behold only the terrestrial side of things; who raise their views to no higher objects than the succession of human contingencies, and the weak efforts of human ability; who have no protector or patron in the heavens, to enliven their prosperity, or to warm their hearts with gratitude and trust!

II. RELIGION affords to good men peculiar security in the enjoyment of their prosperity. One of the first reflections which must strike every thinking man, after his situation in the world has become agreeable, is, That the continuance of such a situation is most uncertain. From a variety of causes, he lies open to change. On many sides he sees that he may be pierced; and the wider his comforts extend, the broader is the mark which he spreads to the arrows of misfortune. Hence many a secret alarm to the reflecting mind; and to those who reject all such alarms, the real danger increases, in proportion to their improvident security.

By worldly assistance it is vain to think of providing any effectual defence, seeing the world's mutability is the very cause of our terror. It is from a higher principle, from a power superiour to the world, that relief must be sought, amidst such disquietudes of the heart. He who in his prosperity can look up to One who is witness to his moderation, humanity, and charity; he who can appeal to Heaven, that he has not been elated by pride, nor overcome by pleasure, but has studied to employ its gifts to the honour of the Giver; this man, if there be any truth in religion, if there be any benignity or goodness in the administration of the universe, has just cause for encouragement and hope. Not that our interest in the Divine Grace will perpetuate to a good man, more than to others, a life of unruffled prosperity. Change and alteration form the very essence of the world. But let the world change around him at pleasure, he has ground to hope that it shall not be able to make him unhappy. Whatever may vary, God's providence is still the same; and his love to the righteous remains unaltered. If it shall be the Divine will to remove one comfort, he trusts that some other shall be given. Whatever is given, whatever is taken away, he confides that in the last result all *shall work for his good.*

Hence he is not disturbed, like bad men, by the mutability of the world. Dangers, which overcome others, shake not his more steady mind. He enjoys the pleasures of life pure and unallayed, because he enjoys them, as long as they last, without anxious terrors. They

are not his all, his only good. He welcomes them when they arrive; and when they pass away, he can eye them, as they depart, without agony or despair. His prosperity strikes a deeper and firmer root than that of the ungodly. And for this reason he is compared, in the Text, to a *tree planted by the rivers of water*: a tree whose branches the tempest may indeed bend, but whose roots it cannot touch; a tree, which may occasionally be stripped of its leaves and blossoms, but which still maintains its place, and in due season flourishes anew. Whereas the sinner in his prosperity, according to the allusion in the book of Job, resembles *the rush that groweth up in the mire**; a slender reed, that may flourish green for a while by the side of the brook, as long as it is cherished by the sun, and fanned by the breeze; till the first bitter blast breaks its feeble stem, roots it out from its bed, and lays it in the dust. Lo! such is the prosperity of *them that forget God; and thus their hope shall perish.*

III. RELIGION forms good men to the most proper temper for the enjoyment of prosperity. A little reflection may satisfy us, that mere possession, even granting it to be secure, does not constitute enjoyment. Give a man all that is in the power of the world to bestow; surround him with riches; crown him with honours; invest him, if you will, with absolute dominion; but leave him at the same time under some secret impression or heaviness of heart; you bestow indeed the materials of enjoyment, but you deprive him of ability to extract it. You set a feast before him, but he wants the power of tasting it. Hence prosperity is so often an equivocal word, denoting merely affluence of possession, but unjustly applied to the miserable possessor.

We all know the effects which any indisposition of the body, even though slight, produces on external prosperity. Visit the gayest and most fortunate man on earth, only with sleepless nights; disorder any single organ of the senses; corrode but one of his smallest nerves; and you shall presently see all his gaiety vanish; and you shall hear him complain that he is a miserable creature, and express his envy of the peasant and the cottager.—And can you believe, that a disease in the soul is less fatal to enjoyment than a disease in the animal frame; or that a sound mind is not as essential as a sound body, to the prosperity of man?—Let us rate sensual gratifications as high as we please, we shall be made to feel that the seat of enjoyment is in the soul. The corrupted temper, and the guilty passions of the bad, frustrate the effect of every advantage which the world confers on them. The world may call them men of pleasure; but of all men they are the greatest foes to pleasure. From their eagerness to grasp, they strangle and destroy it. None but the temperate, the regular, and the virtuous, know how to enjoy prosperity. They bring to its comforts the manly relish of a sound uncorrupted mind. They stop at the proper point, before enjoyment degenerates into disgust, and pleasure is converted into pain. They are strangers to those complaints which flow from spleen, caprice, and all the fantastical distresses of a vitiated mind. While riotous indulgence enervates both the body and the mind, purity and virtue heighten

* Job, viii. 11.

all the powers of human fruition. Moderate and simple pleasures relish high with the temperate; in the midst of his studied refinements, the voluptuary languishes.

Wherever guilt mingles with prosperity, a certain gloom and heaviness enter along with it. Vicious intrigues never fail to entangle and embarrass those who engage in them. But innocence confers ease and freedom on the mind; leaves it open to every pleasing sensation; gives a lightness to the spirits, similar to the native gaiety of youth and health; ill imitated, and ill supplied, by that forced levity of the vicious, which arises not from the health, but from the drunkenness of the mind.

Feeble are all pleasures in which the heart has no part. The selfish gratifications of the bad, are both narrow in their circle, and short in their duration. But prosperity is redoubled to a good man, by his generous use of it. It is reflected back upon him from every one whom he makes happy. In the intercourse of domestic affection, in the attachment of friends, the gratitude of dependants, the esteem and good will of all who know him, he sees blessings multiplied round him, on every side. *When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: Because I delivered the poor that cried, the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. The blessing of him that was ready to perish came upon me, and I caused the widow's heart to sing with joy. I was eyes to the blind, and feet was I to the lame: I was a father to the poor; and the cause which I knew not, I searched out.** — Thus while the righteous flourisheth like a tree planted by the rivers of water, he bringeth forth also his fruit in his season; and that fruit, to pursue the allusion of the Text, he brings forth, not for himself alone. He flourishes, not like a tree in some solitary desert, which scatters its blossoms to the wind, and communicates neither fruit nor shade to any living thing; but like a tree in the midst of an inhabited country, which to some affords friendly shelter, to others, fruit; which is not only admired by all for its beauty, but blessed by the traveller for the shade, and by the hungry for the sustenance it hath given.

IV. RELIGION heightens the prosperity of good men, by the prospect which it affords them of greater happiness to come in another world. I showed, in the foregoing discourse, the mighty effect of the hope of Heaven, in relieving the mind under the troubles of life. And sure, if this hope be able to support the falling, it cannot but improve the flourishing state of man; if it can dispel the thickest gloom of adversity, it must needs enliven prosperity, by the additional lustre which it throws upon it. What is present, is never sufficient to give us full satisfaction. To the present we must always join some agreeable anticipations of futurity, in order to complete our pleasure. What an accession then must the prosperity of the righteous man receive, when, borne with a smooth and gentle gale along the current of life, and looking round on all the blessings of his state, he can consider these as no more than an introduction to higher scenes which are hereafter to open; he can view his present life, as only the porch

through which he is to pass into the palace of bliss; and his present joys, as but a feeble stream, dispensed for his occasional refreshment, until he arrive at that river of life, which flows at God's right hand! — Such prospects purify the mind, at the same time that they gladden it. They prevent the good man from setting too high a value on his present possessions; and thereby assist him in maintaining, amidst the temptations of worldly pleasure, that command of himself which is so essential to the wise and temperate enjoyment of prosperity.

It is the fate of all human pleasures, by continuance, to fade; of most of them, to cloy. Hence, in the most prosperous state, there are frequent intervals of languor, and even of dejection. There are vacuities in the happiest life, which it is not in the power of the world to fill up. What relief so adapted to those vacant or dejected periods, as the pleasing hopes which arise from immortality? How barren and imperfect that prosperity, which can have recourse to no such subsidiary comfort, in order to animate the stagnation of vulgar life, and to supply the insufficiency of worldly pleasures!

Worldly prosperity declines with declining life. In youth its relish was brisk and poignant. It becomes more sober as life advances; and flattens as life descends. He who lately overflowed with cheerful spirits and high hopes, begins to look back with heaviness on the days of former years. He thinks of his old companions who are gone; and reviews past scenes, more agreeable than any which are likely to return. The activity of pursuit is weakened. The gaiety of amusement is fled. The gratifications of sense languish. When his accustomed pleasures, one after another, thus steal treacherously away, what can he, who is an utter stranger to religion, and to the hope of Heaven, substitute in their place? — But even in that drooping period, the promises and hopes of religion support the spirits of a good man till the latest hour. *His leaf*, it is said in the Text, *shall not wither*. It shall not be in the power of time to blast his prosperity: But old age shall receive him into a quiet retreat, where, if lively sensations fail, gentle pleasures remain to sooth him. That hope of immortality, which formerly improved his other enjoyments, now in a great measure supplies their absence. Its importance rises, in proportion as its object draws near. He is not forsaken by the world, but retires from it with dignity; reviewing with a calm mind the part which he has acted, and trusting to the promise of God for an approaching reward. Such sentiments and expectations shed a pleasing tranquillity over the old age of the righteous man. They make the evening of his days go down unclouded; and allow the stream of life, though fallen low, to run clear to the last drop.

• Thus I have shown, I hope, with full evidence, what material ingredients religion and a good conscience are in the prosperity of life. Separated from them, prosperity, how fair soever it may seem to the world, is insipid, nay frequently noxious to the possessor: United with them, it rises into a real blessing bestowed by God upon man. *God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and know-*

*ledge; and joy; but to the sinner he giveth sore travail, to gather, and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God.**

ALLOW me now to conclude the subject, with representing to the prosperous men of the world, those crimes and miseries into which the abuse of their condition is likely to betray them, and calling upon them to beware of the dangers with which they are threatened.

It is unfortunate for mankind, that those situations which favour pleasure, are too generally adverse to virtue. Virtue requires internal government and discipline; prosperity relaxes the mind, and inflames the passions. Virtue is supported by a regard to what is future; prosperity attaches us wholly to what is present. The characteristics of virtue, are modesty and humility; the most common attendants of prosperity, are pride and presumption. One should think, that prosperity would prove the strongest incitement to remember and to honour that God who bestows it. Yet such is the perverseness of human nature, that it proves much oftener the motive to impiety. The changes of the world call the attention of men to an invisible Power. But a train of events proceeding according to their wish, leads them to nothing beyond what they see. The Supreme Giver is concealed from view by his own gifts. This instance of success they ascribe to a fortunate concurrence of worldly causes; that acquisition, to their own skill and industry; unmindful of Him, who from the beginning arranged that series of causes, and who placed them in circumstances where their industry could operate with success. From forgetting God, they too often proceed to despise him. All that is light or giddy in their minds is set in motion by the gale of prosperity. Arrogance and self-sufficiency are lifted up; and their state is, considered, as secured by their own strength. Hence that *pride of countenance*, through which the wicked, in their prosperity, as David observes, *refuse to seek after God*. They are described as *speaking loftily, and setting their mouth against the Heavens. They take the timbrel and harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ; and they say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him? Or, what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?*

They say unto God, Depart from us. — What an impious voice! Could we have believed it possible, that worldly pleasures should so far intoxicate any human heart? Wretched and infatuated men! Have you ever examined on what your confidence rests? — You have said in your hearts, *You shall never be moved*; you fancy yourselves placed on a *mountain which standeth strong*. Awake from those flattering dreams, and behold how every thing totters around you! You stand on the edge of a precipice; and the ground is sliding away below you. In your health, life, possessions, connections, pleasures, principles of destruction work. The mine advances in secret, which saps the foundations, while you revel on the surface. No mighty effort, no long preparation of events, is needed to overturn your prosperity. By slow degrees it rose. Long time, much labour, and the concurrence of many assisting causes, were necessary to rear

* Eccles. ii. 26.

it up; but one slight incident can entirely overthrow it. Suspicions are infused into the patron or the prince on whom you depend; and your disgrace ensues. Exercise, or amusement, kindles a fever in the veins of those whom you loved; and you are robbed of your comforts and hopes. A few grains of sand lodge themselves within you; and the rest of your life is disease and misery. 'Ten thousand contingencies ever float on the current of life, the smallest of which, if it meet your frail bark in the passing, is sufficient to dash it in pieces. Is this a place, is this a time, to swell with fancied security, to riot in unlawful pleasure, and, by your disregard of moral and religious duties, to brave the government of the Almighty? He hath stamped every possession of man with this inscription, *Rejoice with trembling*. Throughout every age, he hath pointed his peculiar displeasure against the confidence of presumption, and the arrogance of prosperity. He hath pronounced, that *whosoever exalteth himself shall be abused*. And shall neither the admonitions which you receive from the visible inconstancy of the world, nor the declarations of the Divine displeasure, be sufficient to check your thoughtless career? Know that, by your impiety, you multiply the dangers which already threaten you on every side. You accelerate the speed with which the changes of the world advance to your destruction. The Almighty touches with his rod that edifice of dust, on which you stand, and boast of your strength; and, at that instant, it crumbles to nothing.

As men, then, bethink yourselves of human instability. As Christians, reverence the awful government of God. Insure your prosperity, by consecrating it to religion and virtue. Be humble in your elevation; be moderate in your views; be submissive to Him who hath raised and distinguished you! Forget not, that on his providence you are as dependent, and to the obedience of his laws as much bound, as the meanest of your fellow-creatures. Disgrace not your station, by that grossness of sensuality, that levity of dissipation, or that insolence of rank, which bespeak a little mind. Let the affability of your behaviour show that you remember the natural equality of men. Let your moderation in pleasure, your command of passion, and your steady regard to the great duties of life, show that you possess a mind worthy of your fortune. Establish your character on the basis of esteem; not on the flattery of dependents, or the praise of sycophants, but on the respect of the wise and the good. Let innocence preside over your enjoyments. Let usefulness and beneficence, not ostentation and vanity, direct the train of your pursuits. Let *your alms, together with your prayers, come up in memorial before God*. So shall your prosperity, under the blessing of Heaven, be as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. So shall it resemble those celestial fires which glow above, with beneficent, with regular, and permanent lustre; and not prove that mirth of fools, which by Solomon is compared to the crackling of thorns under a pot, a glittering and fervent blaze, but speedily extinct.

On the whole, let this be our conclusion, that, both in prosperity and in adversity, religion is the safest guide of human life. Con-

ducted by its light, we reap the pleasures, and at the same time escape the dangers, of a prosperous state. Sheltered under its protection, we stand the shock of adversity with most intrepidity, and suffer least from the violence of the storm. *He that desireth life, and loveth many days that he may see good, let him keep his tongue from evil, and his lips from guile. Let him depart from evil, and do good. Let him seek peace with God, and pursue it.* Then, in his adversity, *God shall hide him in his pavilion. In his prosperity, he shall flourish like a tree planted by the rivers of water. The ungodly are not so; but are like the chaff, light and vile, which the wind driveth away.*

SERMON IV.

ON OUR IMPERFECT KNOWLEDGE OF A FUTURE STATE.

1 COR. xiii. 12.

For now we see through a glass, darkly.

THE Apostle here describes the imperfection of our knowledge with relation to spiritual and eternal objects. He employs two metaphors to represent more strongly the disadvantages under which we lie: One, that we see those objects *through a glass*, that is, through the intervention of a medium which obscures their glory; the other, that we see them *in a riddle* or enigma, which our translators have rendered by seeing them *darkly*; that is, the truth in part discovered, in part concealed, and placed beyond our comprehension.

This description, however just and true, cannot fail to occasion some perplexity to an inquiring mind. For it may seem strange, that so much darkness should be left upon those celestial objects, towards which we are at the same time commanded to aspire. We are strangers in the universe of God. Confined to that spot on which we dwell, we are permitted to know nothing of what is transacting in the regions above us and around us. By much labour, we acquire a superficial acquaintance with a few sensible objects, which we find in our present habitation; but we enter, and we depart, under a total ignorance of the nature and laws of the spiritual world. One subject in particular, when our thoughts proceed in this train, must often recur upon the mind with peculiar anxiety; that is, the immortality of the soul, and the future state of man. Exposed as we are at present to such variety of afflictions, and subjected to so much disappointment in all our pursuits of happiness, Why, it may be said, has our gracious Creator denied us the consolation of a full discovery of our future existence, if indeed such an existence be prepared for us?—Reason, it is true, suggests many arguments in behalf of immortality: Revelation gives full assurance of it. Yet even that Gospel, which is said to have *brought life and immortality to light*, allows us to see *only through a glass, darkly. It doth not yet appear what we shall be.* Our knowledge of a future world is very

imperfect; our ideas of it are faint and confused. It is not displayed in such a manner, as to make an impression suited to the importance of the object. The faith even of the best men is much inferior, both in clearness and in force, to the evidence of sense; and proves on many occasions insufficient to counterbalance the temptations of the present world. Happy moments indeed there sometimes are in the lives of pious men, when, sequestered from worldly cares, and borne up on the wings of Divine contemplation, they rise to a near and transporting view of immortal glory. But such efforts of the mind are rare, and cannot be long supported. When the spirit of meditation subsides, this lively sense of a future state decays; and though the general belief of it remain, yet even good men, when they return to the ordinary business and cares of life, seem to rejoin the multitude, and to re-assume the same hopes, and fears, and interests, which influence the rest of the world.

From such reflections, a considerable difficulty respecting this important subject either arises, or seems to arise. Was such an obscure and imperfect discovery of another life worthy to proceed from God? Does it not afford some ground, either to tax his goodness, or to suspect the evidence of its coming from him?—This is the point which we are now to consider; and let us consider it with that close attention which the subject merits. Let us inquire, whether we have any reason, either to complain of Providence, or to object to the evidence of a future state, because that evidence is not of a more sensible and striking nature. Let us attempt humbly to trace the reasons, why, though permitted to know and to see somewhat of the eternal world, we are nevertheless permitted only to *know in part, and to see through a glass, darkly.*

It plainly appears to be the plan of the Deity, in all his dispensations, to mix light with darkness, evidence with uncertainty. Whatever the reasons of this procedure be, the fact is undeniable. He is described in the Old Testament as *a God that hideth himself.* Clouds and darkness are said to surround him. His way is in the sea, and his path in the great waters; his footsteps are not known.* Both the works and the ways of God are full of mystery. In the ordinary course of his government, innumerable events occur which perplex us to the utmost. There is a certain limit to all our inquiries of religion, beyond which if we attempt to proceed, we are lost in a maze of inextricable difficulties. Even that revelation which affords such material instruction to man, concerning his duty and his happiness, leaves many doubts unresolved. Why it was not given sooner; why not to all men; why there should be so many things in it *hard to be understood*; are difficulties not inconsiderable, in the midst of that incontestible evidence by which it is supported. If, then, the future state of man be not placed in so full and clear a light as we desire, this is no more than what the analogy of all religion, both natural and revealed, gave us reason to expect.

But such a solution of the difficulty will be thought imperfect. It may, perhaps, not give much satisfaction to show, that all religion

* Isai. xlv. 15.

abounds with difficulties of a like nature. Our situation, it will be said, is so much the more to be lamented, that not on one side only we are confined in our inquiries, but on all hands environed with mysterious obscurity. — Let us then, if so much dissatisfied with our condition, give scope for once to Fancy, and consider how the plan of Providence might be rectified to our wish. Let us call upon the Sceptic, and desire him to say, what measure of information would afford him entire satisfaction.

This, he will tell us, requires not any long or deep deliberation. He desires only to have his view enlarged beyond the limits of this corporeal state. Instead of resting upon evidence which requires discussion, which must be supported by much reasoning, and which, after all, he alleges yields very imperfect information, he demands the everlasting mansions to be so displayed, if in truth such mansions there be, as to place faith on a level with the evidence of sense. What noble and happy effects, he exclaims, would instantly follow, if man thus beheld his present and his future existence at once before him! He would then become worthy of his rank in the creation. Instead of being the sport, as now, of degrading passions and childish attachments, he would act solely on the principles of immortality. His pursuit of virtue would be steady; his life would be undisturbed and happy. Superiour to the attacks of distress, and to the solicitations of pleasure, he would advance, by a regular process, towards those divine rewards and honours which were continually present to his view. — Thus Fancy, with as much ease and confidence as if it were a perfect judge of creation, erects a new world to itself, and exults with admiration of its own work. But let us pause, and suspend this admiration, till we coolly examine the consequences that would follow from this supposed reformation of the universe.

CONSIDER the nature and circumstances of man. Introduced into the world in an indigent condition, he is supported at first by the care of others; and, as soon as he begins to act for himself, finds labour and industry to be necessary for sustaining his life, and supplying his wants. Mutual defence and interest give rise to society; and society, when formed, requires distinctions of property, diversity of conditions, subordinations of ranks, and a multiplicity of occupations, in order to advance the general good. The services of the poor, and the protection of the rich, become reciprocally necessary. The governors, and the governed, must co-operate for general safety. Various arts must be studied; some respecting the cultivation of the mind, others the care of the body; some to ward off the evils, and some to provide the conveniences of life. In a word, by the destination of his Creator, and the necessities of his nature, man commences, at once, an active, not merely a contemplative being. Religion assumes him as such. It supposes him employed in the world, as on a busy stage. It regulates, but does not abolish, the enterprises and cares of ordinary life. It addresses itself to the various ranks in society; to the rich and the poor, to the magistrate and subject. It rebukes the slothful; directs the diligent how to labour; and requires every man to *do his own business.*

Suppose, now, that veil to be withdrawn which conceals another world from our view. Let all obscurity vanish; let us no longer see darkly, as through a glass; but let every man enjoy that intuitive perception of divine and eternal objects which the Sceptic was supposed to desire. The immediate effect of such a discovery would be, to annihilate in our eye all human objects, and to produce a total stagnation in the affairs of the world. Were the celestial glory exposed to our admiring view; did the angelic harmony sound in our enraptured ears; what earthly concerns would have the power of engaging our attention for a single moment? All the studies and pursuits, the arts and labours, which now employ the activity of man, which support the order, or promote the happiness of society, would lie neglected and abandoned. Those desires and fears, those hopes and interests, by which we are at present stimulated, would cease to operate. Human life would present no objects sufficient to rouse the mind; to kindle the spirit of enterprise, or to urge the hand of industry. If the mere sense of duty engaged a good man to take some part in the business of the world, the task, when submitted to, would prove distasteful. Even the preservation of life would be slighted, if he were not bound to it by the authority of God. Impatient of his confinement within this tabernacle of dust, languishing for the happy day of his translation to those glorious regions which were displayed to his sight, he would sojourn on earth as a melancholy exile. Whatever Providence has prepared for the entertainment of man, would be viewed with contempt. Whatever is now attractive in society, would appear insipid. In a word, he would be no longer a fit inhabitant of this world, nor be qualified for those exertions which are allotted to him in his present sphere of being. But, all his faculties being sublimated above the measure of humanity, he would be in the condition of a being of superiour order, who, obliged to reside among men, would regard their pursuits with scorn, as dreams, trifles, and puerile amusements of a day.

But to this reasoning it may perhaps be replied, That such consequences as I have now stated, supposing them to follow, deserve not much regard. — For what though the present arrangement of human affairs were entirely changed, by a clearer view, and a stronger impression of our future state? Would not such a change prove the highest blessing to man? Is not his attachment to worldly objects the great source both of his misery and his guilt? Employed in perpetual contemplation of heavenly objects, and in preparation for the enjoyment of them, would he not become more virtuous, and of course more happy, than the nature of his present employments and attachments permits him to be? — Allowing for a moment, the consequence to be such, this much is yielded, that, upon the supposition which was made, man would not be the creature which he now is, nor human life the state which we now behold. How far the change would contribute to his welfare, comes to be considered.

If there be any principle fully ascertained by religion, it is, That this life was intended for a state of trial and improvement to man. His preparation for a better world required a gradual purification

carried on by steps of progressive discipline. The situation, therefore, here assigned him, was such as to answer this design, by calling forth all his active powers, by giving full scope to his moral dispositions, and bringing to light his whole character. Hence it became proper, that difficulty and temptation should arise in the course of his duty. Ample rewards were promised to virtue; but these rewards were left, as yet, in obscurity and distant prospect. The impressions of sense were so balanced against the discoveries of immortality, as to allow a conflict between faith and sense, between conscience and desire, between present pleasure and future good. In this conflict, the souls of good men are tried, improved, and strengthened. In this field, their honours are reaped. Here are formed the capital virtues of fortitude, temperance, and self-denial; moderation in prosperity, patience in adversity, submission to the will of God, and charity and forgiveness to men, amidst the various competitions of worldly interest.

Such is the plan of Divine wisdom for man's improvement. But put the case that the plans devised by human wisdom were to take place, and that the rewards of the just were to be more fully displayed to view; the exercise of all those graces which I have mentioned, would be entirely superseded. Their very names would be unknown. Every temptation being withdrawn, every worldly attachment being subdued by the overpowering discoveries of eternity, no trial of sincerity, no discrimination of characters, would remain; no opportunity would be afforded for those active exertions, which are the means of purifying and perfecting the good. On the competition between time and eternity, depends the chief exercise of human virtue. The obscurity which at present hangs over eternal objects, preserves the competition. Remove that obscurity, and you remove human virtue from its place. You overthrow that whole system of discipline, by which imperfect creatures are, in this life, gradually trained up for a more perfect state.

This, then, is the conclusion to which at last we arrive: That the full display which was demanded, of the heavenly glory, would be so far from improving the human soul, that it would abolish those virtues and duties which are the great instruments of its improvement. It would be unsuitable to the character of man in every view, either as an active being, or a moral agent. It would disqualify him for taking part in the affairs of the world; for relishing the pleasures, or for discharging the duties of life: In a word, it would entirely defeat the purpose of his being placed on this earth. And the question, Why the Almighty has been pleased to leave a spiritual world, and the future existence of man, under so much obscurity, resolves in the end into this, Why there should be such a creature as man in the universe of God? — Such is the issue of the improvements proposed to be made on the plans of Providence. They add to the discoveries of the superiour wisdom of God, and of the presumption and folly of man.

From what has been said, it now appears, That no reasonable objection to the belief of a future state arises, from the imperfect disco-

veries of it which we enjoy; from the difficulties that are mingled with its evidence; from our *seeing* ~~do~~ *through a glass, darkly; and being left to walk by faith; and not, by sight.* It cannot be otherwise, it ought not to be otherwise, in our present state. The evidence which is afforded, is sufficient for the conviction of a candid mind, sufficient for a rational ground of conduct; though not so striking as to withdraw our attention from the present world, or altogether to overcome the impression of sensible objects. In such evidence, it becomes us to acquiesce, without indulging either doubts or complaints, on account of our not receiving all the satisfaction which we fondly desire, but which our present immaturity of being excludes. For, upon the supposition of immortality, this life is no other than the childhood of existence; and the measures of our knowledge must be proportioned to such a state. To the successive stages of human life, from infancy to old age, belong certain peculiar attachments, certain cares, desires, and interests; which open not abruptly, but by gradual advances on the mind, as it becomes fit to receive them, and is prepared for acting the part to which, in their order, they pertain. Hence, in the education of a child, no one thinks of inspiring him all at once with the knowledge, the sentiments, and views of a man, and with contempt for the exercises and amusements of childhood. On the contrary, employments suited to his age are allowed to occupy him. By these his powers are gradually unfolded; and advantage is taken of his youthful pursuits, to improve and strengthen his mind; till, step by step, he is led on to higher prospects, and prepared for a larger and more important scene of action.

This analogy, which so happily illustrates the present conduct of the Deity towards man, deserves attention the more, as it is the very illustration used by the Apostle, when treating of this subject in the context. *Now, says he, we know in part—but when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things. For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then, face to face: Now I know in part; but then, I shall know even as I am known.* Under the care of the Almighty, our education is now going on, from a mortal to an immortal state. As much light is let in upon us, as we can bear without injury. When the objects become too splendid and dazzling for our sight, the curtain is drawn. Exercised in such a field of action, as suits the strength of our unripened powers, we are, at the same time, by proper prospects and hopes, prompted to aspire towards the manhood of our nature, the time when *childish things shall be put away.* But still, betwixt those future prospects, and the impression of present objects, such an accurate proportion is established, as on the one hand shall not produce a total contempt of earthly things, while we aspire to those that are heavenly; and on the other, shall not encourage such a degree of attachment to our present state, as would render us unworthy of future advancement. In a word, the whole course of things is so ordered, that we neither, by an irregular and

precipitate education, become men too soon; nor, by a fond and trifling indulgence, be suffered to continue children for ever.

LET these reflections not only remove the doubts which may arise from our obscure knowledge of immortality, but likewise produce the highest admiration of the wisdom of our Creator. The structure of the natural world affords innumerable instances of profound design, which no attentive spectator can survey without wonder. In the moral world, where the workmanship is of much finer and more delicate contexture, subjects of still greater admiration open to view. But admiration must rise to its highest point, when those parts of the moral constitution, which at first were reputed blemishes, which carried the appearance of objections, either to the wisdom or the goodness of Providence, are discovered, on more accurate inspection, to be adjusted with the most exquisite propriety. We have now seen, that the darkness of man's condition is no less essential to his well-being, than the light which he enjoys. His internal powers, and his external situation, appear to be exactly fitted to each other. Those complaints which we are apt to make, of our limited capacity and narrow views, of our inability to penetrate farther into the future destination of man, are found, from the foregoing observations, to be just as unreasonable, as the childish complaints of our not being formed with a microscopic eye, nor furnished with an eagle's wing; that is, of not being endowed with powers which would subvert the nature, and counteract the laws, of our present state.

In order to do justice to the subject, I must observe, that the same reasoning which has been now employed with respect to our knowledge of immortality, is equally applicable to many other branches of intellectual knowledge. Thus, why we are permitted to know so little of the nature of that Eternal Being who rules the universe; why the manner in which he operates on the natural and moral world is wholly concealed; why we are kept in such ignorance, with respect to the extent of his works, to the nature and agency of spiritual beings, and even with respect to the union between our own soul and body: To all these, and several other inquiries of the same kind, which often employ the solicitous researches of speculative men, the answer is the same that was given to the interesting question which makes the subject of our discourse. The degree of knowledge desired, would prove incompatible with the design, and with the proper business of this life. It would raise us to a sphere too exalted; would reveal objects too great and striking for our present faculties; would excite feelings too strong for us to bear; in a word, would unfit us for thinking or acting like human creatures. It is, therefore, reserved for a more advanced period of our nature; and the hand of Infinite wisdom hath in mercy drawn a veil over scenes which would overpower the sight of mortals.

One instance, in particular, of Divine wisdom is so illustrious, and corresponds so remarkably with our present subject, that I cannot pass it over without notice; that is, the concealment under which Providence has placed the future events of our life on earth. The desire of penetrating into this unknown region, has ever been one of

the most anxious passions of men. It has often seized the wise as well as the credulous, and given rise to many vain and impious superstitions throughout the whole earth. Burning with curiosity at the approach of some critical event, and impatient under the perplexity of conjecture and doubt, How cruel is Providence, we are apt to exclaim, in denying to man the power of foresight, and in limiting him to the knowledge of the present moment! Were he permitted to look forward into the course of destiny, how much more suitably would he be prepared for the various turns and changes in his life? With what moderation would he enjoy his prosperity under the fore-knowledge of an approaching reverse? And with what eagerness be prompted to improve the flying hours, by seeing the inevitable term draw nigh which was to finish his course?

But while fancy indulges such vain desires, and criminal complaints, this coveted fore-knowledge must clearly appear to the eye of Reason, to be the most fatal gift which the Almighty could bestow. If, in this present mixed state, all the successive scenes of distress through which we are to pass, were laid before us in one view, perpetual sadness would overcast our life. Hardly would any transient gleams of intervening joy be able to force their way through the cloud. Faint would be the relish of pleasures of which we foresaw the close: Insupportable the burden of afflictions, under which we were oppressed by a load not only of present, but of an anticipated sorrow. Friends would begin their union, with lamenting the day which was to dissolve it; and, with weeping eye, the parent would every moment behold the child whom he knew that he was to lose. In short, as soon as that mysterious veil, which now covers futurity, was lifted up, all the gaiety of life would disappear; its flattering hopes, its pleasing illusions, would vanish; and nothing but its vanity and sadness remain. The foresight of the hour of death would continually interrupt the course of human affairs, and the overwhelming prospect of the future, instead of exciting men to proper activity, would render them immoveable with consternation and dismay. — How much more friendly to man is that mixture of knowledge and ignorance which is allotted to him in this state! Ignorant of the events which are to befall us, and of the precise term which is to conclude our life, by this ignorance our enjoyment of present objects is favoured; and knowing that death is certain, and that human affairs are full of change, by this knowledge our attachment to those objects is moderated. Precisely in the same manner, as by the mixture of evidence and obscurity which remains on the prospect of a future state, a proper balance is preserved betwixt our love of this life, and our desire of a better.

The longer that our thoughts dwell on this subject, the more we must be convinced, that in nothing the Divine wisdom is more admirable, than in proportioning knowledge to the necessities of man. Instead of lamenting our condition, that we are permitted only to see *as through a glass, darkly*, we have reason to bless our Creator, no less for what he hath concealed, than for what he hath allowed us to know. *He is wonderful in counsel, as he is excellent in working. He*

is wise in heart, and his thoughts are deep. How unsearchable are the riches of the wisdom of the knowledge of God !

FROM the whole view which we have taken of the subject, this important instruction arises, that the great design of all the knowledge, and in particular of the religious knowledge which God hath afforded us, is, to fit us for discharging the duties of life. No useless discoveries are made to us in religion : No discoveries even of useful truths, beyond the precise degree of information, which is subservient to right conduct. To this great end all our information points. In this centre all the lines of knowledge meet. *Life and immortality are brought to light in the gospel ;* yet not so displayed as to gratify the curiosity of the world with an astonishing spectacle ; but only so far made known, as to assist and support us in the practice of our duty. If the discovery were more imperfect, it would excite no desire of immortality ; if it were more full and striking, it would render us careless of life. On the first supposition, no sufficient motive to virtue would appear ; on the second, no proper trial of it would remain. In the one case, we should think and act like men who *have their portion only in this world ;* in the other case, like men who have no concern with this world at all. Whereas now, by the wise constitution of Heaven, we are placed in the most favourable situation for acting, with propriety, our allotted part here ; and for rising, in due course, to higher honour and happiness hereafter.

Let us then second the kind intentions of Providence, and act upon the plan which it hath pointed out. Checking our inquisitive solicitude about what the Almighty hath concealed, let us diligently improve what he hath made known. Inhabitants of the earth, we are at the same time candidates for Heaven. Looking upon these as only different views of one consistent character, let us carry on our preparation for Heaven, not by abstracting ourselves from the concerns of this world, but by fulfilling the duties and offices of every station in life. *Living soberly, righteously, and godly in the present world, let us look for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ.*

Before I conclude, it may be proper to observe, That the reasonings in this discourse give no ground to apprehend any danger or our being too much influenced by the belief of a future state. I have shown the hurtful effects which would follow from too bright and full a discovery of the glory of that state ; and in showing this, I have justified the decree of Providence, which permits no such discovery. But as our nature is at present constituted, attached by so many strong connexions to the world of sense, and enjoying a communication so feeble and distant with the world of spirits, we need fear no danger from cultivating intercourse with the latter as much as possible. On the contrary, from that intercourse, the chief security of our virtue is to be sought. The bias of our nature leans so much towards sense, that from this side the peril is to be dreaded, and on this side the defence is to be provided.

Let us then *walk by faith*. Let us strengthen this principle of action to the utmost of our power. Let us implore the Divine

grace, to strengthen it within us more and more: That we may thence derive an antidote against that subtle poison, which incessant commerce with the objects of sense diffuses through our souls; that we may hence acquire purity and dignity of manners suited to our divine hopes; and undefiled by the pleasures of the world, unshaken by its terrors, may preserve to the end one constant tenour of integrity. Till at last, having, under the conduct of Christian faith, happily finished the period of discipline, we enter on that state, where a far nobler scene shall open; where eternal objects shall shine in their native splendour; where, this twilight of mortal life being past, the *Sun of Righteousness* shall rise; and, that which is perfect being come, that which is in part shall be done away.

SERMON V.

ON THE DEATH OF CHRIST.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

JOHN, xvii. 1.

Jesus lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father! the hour is come.

THESE were the words of our blessed Lord on a memorable occasion. The feast of the passover drew nigh, at which he knew that he was to suffer. The night was arrived wherein he was to be delivered into the hands of his enemies. He had spent the evening in conference with his disciples; like a dying father in the midst of his family, mingling consolations with his last instructions. When he had ended his discourse to them, he *lifted up his eyes to heaven*, and, with the words which I have now read, began that solemn prayer of intercession for the church, which closed his ministry. Immediately after, he went forth with his disciples into the garden of Gethsemane, and surrendered himself to those who came to apprehend him.

Such was the situation of our Lord at the time of his pronouncing these words. He saw his mission on the point of being accomplished. He had the prospect full before him, of all that he was about to suffer — *Father! the hour is come.* — What hour? An hour the most critical, the most pregnant with great events, since hours had begun to be numbered, since time had begun to run. It was the hour in which the Son of God was to terminate the labours of his important life, by a death still more important and illustrious; the hour of atoning, by his sufferings, for the guilt of mankind; the hour of accomplishing prophecies, types, and symbols, which had been carried on through a series of ages; the hour of concluding the old, and of introducing to the world the new dispensation of religion; the hour of his triumphing over the world, and death and hell; the hour of his erecting that spiritual kingdom, which is to last for ever. Such is the hour, such are the events, which you are to commemorate in the sacrament of our Lord's Supper. I shall attempt to set them

before you as proper subjects, at this time, of your devout meditation. To display them in their genuine majesty, is beyond the ability of man.

I. THIS was the hour in which Christ was glorified by his sufferings. The whole of his life had discovered much real greatness, under a mean appearance. Through the cloud of his humiliation, his native lustre often broke forth; but never did it shine so bright, as in this last, this trying hour. It was indeed the hour of distress, and of blood. He knew it to be such; and when he uttered the words of the Text, he had before his eyes, the executioner and the cross, the scourge, the nails, and the spear. But by prospects of this nature his soul was not to be overcome. It is distress which exalts every great character; and distress was to glorify the Son of God. He was now to teach all mankind, by his example, how to suffer and to die. He was to stand forth before his enemies, as the faithful witness of the truth; justifying by his behaviour the character which he assumed, and sealing with his blood the doctrine which he taught.

What magnanimity in all his words and actions on this great occasion! The court of Herod, the judgment-hall of Pilate, the hill of Calvary, were so many theatres prepared for his displaying all the virtues of a constant and patient mind. When led forth to suffer, the first voice which we hear from him, is a generous lamentation over the fate of his unfortunate, though guilty, country; and, to the last moment of his life, we behold him in possession of the same gentle and benevolent spirit. No upbraiding, no complaining expression escaped from his lips, during the long and painful approaches of a cruel death. He betrayed no symptom of a weak or a vulgar, of a discomposed or impatient mind. With the utmost attention of filial tenderness, he committed his aged mother to the care of his beloved disciple.* With all the dignity of a sovereign, he conferred pardon on a penitent fellow-sufferer. With a greatness of mind beyond example, he spent his last moments in apologies and prayers for those who were shedding his blood.

By wonders in heaven, and wonders on earth, was this hour distinguished. All nature seemed to feel it; and the dead and the living bore witness to its importance. The veil of the temple was rent in twain. The earth shook. There was darkness over all the land. The graves were opened, and many who slept arose, and went into the Holy City. Nor were these the only prodigies of this awful hour. The most hardened hearts were subdued and changed. The judge who, in order to gratify the multitude, passed sentence against him, publicly attested his innocence. The Roman centurion, who presided at the execution, glorified God, and acknowledged the sufferer to be more than man. After he saw the things which had passed, he said, *Certainly this was a righteous person; truly this was the Son of God.* The Jewish malefactor who was crucified with him, addressed him as a King, and implored his favour. Even the crowd of insensible spectators, who had come forth as to a common spectacle, and who began with clamours and insults, returned home, smiting their

* John, xix. 26, 27.

breasts.—Look back on the heroes, the philosophers, the legislators of old. View them in their last moments. Recal every circumstance which distinguished their departure from the world. Where can you find such an assemblage of high virtues, and of great events, as concur at the death of Christ? Where so many testimonies given to the dignity of the dying person, by earth and by heaven?

II. THIS was the hour in which Christ atoned for the sins of mankind, and accomplished our eternal redemption. It was the hour when that great sacrifice was offered up, the efficacy of which reaches back to the first transgression of man, and extends forward to the end of time; the hour when, from the cross, as from an high altar, the blood was flowing, which washed away the guilt of the nations.

This awful dispensation of the Almighty contains mysteries which are beyond the discovery of man. It is one of those things into which *the Angels desire to look*. What has been revealed to us is, That the death of Christ was the interposition of Heaven for preventing the ruin of human kind. We know, that, under the government of God, misery is the natural consequence of guilt. After rational creatures had, by their criminal conduct, introduced disorder into the Divine kingdom, there was no ground to believe, that, by their penitence and prayers alone, they could prevent the destruction which threatened them. The prevalence of propitiatory sacrifices throughout the earth, proclaims it to be the general sense of mankind, that mere repentance was not of sufficient avail to expiate sin, or to stop its penal effects. By the constant allusions which are carried on in the New Testament to the sacrifices under the Law, as pre-signifying a great atonement made by Christ; and by the strong expressions which are used in describing the effects of his death, the sacred writers show, as plainly as language allows, that there was an efficacy in his sufferings far beyond that of mere example and instruction. The nature and extent of that efficacy, we are unable, as yet, fully to trace. Part we are capable of beholding; and the wisdom of what we behold, we have reason to adore. We discern, in this plan of redemption, the evil of sin strongly exhibited; and the justice of the Divine government awfully exemplified, in Christ suffering for sinners. But let us not imagine, that our present discoveries unfold the whole influence of the death of Christ. It is connected with causes into which we cannot penetrate. It produces consequences too extensive for us to explore. *God's thoughts are not as our thoughts.* In all things we see only in part; and here, if any where, we see also *as through a glass, darkly.*

This, however, is fully manifest, that redemption is one of the most glorious works of the Almighty. If the hour of the creation of the world was great and illustrious; that hour, when, from the dark and formless mass, this fair system of nature arose at the Divine command; when *the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy*; no less illustrious is the hour of the restoration of the world; the hour when, from condemnation and misery, it emerged into happiness and peace. With less external majesty it was attended, but is, on that account, the more wonderful, that, under an appearance so simple, such great events were covered.

III. IN this hour the long series of prophecies, visions, types, and figures, was accomplished. This was the centre in which they all met: This the point towards which they had tended and verged, throughout the course of so many generations. You behold the Law and the Prophets standing, if we may speak so, at the foot of the cross, and doing homage. You behold Moses and Aaron bearing the ark of the covenant; David and Elijah presenting the oracle of testimony. You behold all the priests and sacrifices, all the rights and ordinances, all the types and symbols assembled together to receive their consummation. Without the death of Christ, the worship and ceremonies of the Law would have remained a pompous, but unmeaning institution. In the hour when he was crucified, *the book with the seven seals* was opened. Every rite assumed its significancy; every prediction met its event; every symbol displayed its correspondence.

The dark, and seemingly ambiguous, method of conveying important discoveries under figures and emblems, was not peculiar to the sacred books. The spirit of God, in pre-signifying the death of Christ, adopted that plan, according to which the whole knowledge of those early ages was propagated through the world. Under the veil of mysterious allusion, all wisdom was then concealed. From the sensible world, images were every-where borrowed, to describe things unseen. More was understood to be meant, than was openly expressed. By enigmatical rites, the Priest communicated his doctrines; by parables and allegories, the Philosopher instructed his disciples; even the Legislator, by figurative sayings, commanded the reverence of the people. Agreeably to this prevailing mode of instruction, the whole dispensation of the Old Testament was so conducted, as to be the shadow and the figure of a spiritual system. Every remarkable event, every distinguished personage, under the Law, is interpreted in the New Testament, as bearing some reference to the hour of which we treat. If Isaac was laid upon the altar as an innocent victim; if David was driven from his throne by the wicked, and restored by the hand of God; if the brazen serpent was lifted up to heal the people; if the rock was smitten by Moses, to furnish drink in the wilderness; all were types of Christ, and alluded to his death.

In predicting the same event the language of ancient prophecy was magnificent, but seemingly contradictory: For it foretold a Messiah, who was to be at once a sufferer and a conqueror. *The Star was to come out of Jacob, and the Branch to spring from the stem of Jesse. The Angel of the Covenant, the Desire of all nations, was to come suddenly to his temple; and to him was to be the gathering of the people.* Yet, at the same time, he was to be despised and rejected of men; he was to be taken from prison, and from judgment, and to be led as a lamb to the slaughter. *That he was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; yet his battles were to come to his light, and Kings to the brightness of his rising.* In the hour when Christ died, those prophetic riddles were solved; those seeming contradictions were reconciled. The obscurity of oracles, and the ambiguity of

types vanished. The *Sun of Righteousness* rose; and, together with the dawn of religion, those shadows passed away.

IV. THIS was the hour of the abolition of the Law, and the introduction of the Gospel; the hour of terminating the old and of beginning the new dispensation of religious knowledge and worship throughout the earth. Viewed in this light, it forms the most august æra which is to be found in the history of mankind. When Christ was suffering on the cross, we are informed by one of the Evangelists, that he said, *I thirst*; and that they filled a sponge with vinegar, and put it to his mouth. *After he had tasted the vinegar, knowing that all things were now accomplished, and the Scriptures fulfilled, he said, It is finished**; that is, This offered draught of vinegar was the last circumstance predicted by an ancient Prophet†, that remained to be fulfilled. The vision and the prophecy are now sealed: The Mosaic dispensation is closed. *And he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.*

It is finished.—When he uttered these words, he changed the state of the universe. At that moment the Law ceased, and the Gospel commenced. This was the ever-memorable point of time which separated the old and the new world from each other. On one side of the point of separation, you behold the Law, with its priests, its sacrifices, and its rites, retiring from sight. On the other side, you behold the Gospel, with its simple and venerable institutions, coming forward into view. Significantly was the veil of the temple rent in this hour; for the glory then departed from between the cherubims. The legal High Priest delivered up his Urim and Thummim, his breast-plate, his robes, and his incense: And CHRIST stood forth as the great High Priest of all succeeding generations. By that one sacrifice, which he now offered, he abolished sacrifices for ever. Altars on which the fire had blazed for ages, were now to smoke no more. Victims were no more to bleed. *Not with the blood of bulls and goats, but with his own blood, he now entered into the Holy Place, there to appear in the presence of God for us.*

This was the hour of association and union to all the worshippers of God. When Christ said, *It is finished*, he threw down the wall of partition which had so long divided the Gentile from the Jew. He gathered into one, all the faithful out of every kindred and people. He proclaimed the hour to be come, when the knowledge of the true God should be no longer confined to one nation, nor his worship to one temple; but over all the earth, the worshippers of the Father should *serve him in spirit and in truth*. From that hour they who dwelt in the *uttermost ends of the earth, strangers to the covenant of promise*, began to be *brought nigh*. In that hour the light of the Gospel dawned from afar on the British islands.

During a long course of ages, Providence seemed to be occupied in preparing the world for this revolution. The whole Jewish æconomy was intended to usher it in. The knowledge of God was preserved unextinguished in one corner of the world, that thence, in due time, might issue forth the light which was to overspread the

* John, xix. 28, 29, 30.

† Psal. lxxi. 21.

earth. Successive revelations gradually enlarged the views of men beyond the narrow bounds of Judæa, to a more extensive kingdom of God. Signs and miracles awakened their expectation, and directed their eyes towards this great event. Whether God descended on the flaming mountain, or spoke by the Prophet's voice; whether he scattered his chosen people into captivity, or re-assembled them in their own land; he was still carrying on a progressive plan, which was accomplished at the death of Christ.

Not only in the territories of Israel, but over all the earth, the great dispensations of Providence respected the approach of this important hour. If empires rose or fell; if war divided, or peace united the nations; if learning civilized their manners, or philosophy enlarged their views; all was, by the secret decree of Heaven, made to ripen the world for that *fulness of time*, when Christ was to publish the whole counsel of God. The Persian, the Macedonian, the Roman conqueror, entered upon the stage each at his predicted period; and *though he meant not so, neither did his heart think so*, ministered to this hour. The revolutions of power, and the succession of monarchies, were so arranged by Providence, as to facilitate the progress of the Gospel through the habitable world, after the day had arrived, *when the stone which was cut out of the mountain without hands, should become a great mountain, and fill the earth.** This was the day which *Abraham saw afar off, and was glad*. This was the day which *many Prophets and Kings, and righteous men, desired to see, but could not*; the day for which *the earnest expectation of the creature*, long oppressed with ignorance, and bewildered in superstition, might be justly said *to wait*.

V. THIS was the hour of Christ's triumph over all the powers of darkness; the hour in which he overthrew dominions and thrones, *led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men*. The contest which the kingdom of darkness had long maintained against the kingdom of light, was now brought to its crisis. The period was come, when *the seed of the woman should bruise the head of the serpent*. For many ages, the most gross superstition had filled the earth. *The glory of the incorruptible God was every-where, except in the land of Judæa, changed into images made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and beasts, and creeping things*. The world, which the Almighty created for himself, seemed to have become a temple of idols. Even to vices and passions altars were raised; and what was entitled Religion, was in effect a discipline of impurity. In the midst of this universal darkness, Satan had erected his throne, and the learned and polished, as well as the savage nations, bowed down before him. But at the hour when Christ appeared on the cross, the signal of his defeat was given. His kingdom suddenly departed from him; the reign of idolatry passed away: He was *beheld to fall like lightning from Heaven*. In that hour, the foundation of every Pagan temple shook. The statue of every false God tottered on its base. The Priest fled from his falling shrine; and the Heathen oracles became dumb for ever.

* Dan. ii. 34, 35.

As on the cross Christ triumphed over Satan, so he overcame his auxiliary the world. Long had it assailed him with its temptations and discouragements. In this hour of severe trial, he surmounted them all. Formerly he had despised the pleasures of the world. He now baffled its terrors. Hence he is justly said to have *crucified the world*. By his sufferings he ennobled distress; and he darkened the lustre of the pomp and vanities of life. He discovered to his followers the path which leads, through affliction, to glory and to victory; and he imparted to them the same spirit which enabled him to overcome. *My kingdom is not of this world. In this world ye shall have tribulation: But be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.**

Death also, the last foe of man, was the victim of this hour. The formidable appearance of the spectre remained; but his dart was taken away. For, in the hour when Christ expiated guilt, he disarmed death, by securing the resurrection of the just. When he said to his penitent fellow-sufferer, *To-day thou shalt be with me in paradise*, he announced to all his followers the certainty of heavenly bliss. He declared the *cherubims* to be dismissed, and the *flaming sword* to be sheathed, which had been appointed at the fall, *to keep from man the way of the tree of life*.† Faint, before this period, had been the hope, indistinct the prospect, which even good men enjoyed of the heavenly kingdom. *Life and immortality were now brought to light*. From the hill of Calvary, the first clear and certain view was given to the world of the everlasting mansions. Since that hour, they have been the perpetual consolation of believers in Christ. Under trouble, they sooth their minds; amidst temptation, they support their virtue; and in their dying moments, enable them to say, *O death! where is thy sting? O grave! where is thy victory?*

VI. THIS was the hour when our Lord erected that spiritual kingdom which is never to end. How vain are the counsels and designs of men! How shallow is the policy of the wicked! How short their triumphing! The enemies of Christ imagined, that in this hour they had successfully accomplished their plan for his destruction. They believed, that they had entirely scattered the small party of his followers, and had extinguished his name and his honour for ever. In derision, they addressed him as a King. They clothed him with purple robes; they crowned him with a crown of thorns; they put a reed into his hand; and, with insulting mockery, bowed the knee before him. Blind and impious men! How little did they know, that the Almighty was at that moment *setting him as a King on the hill of Sion; giving him the Heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession!* How little did they know that their badges of mock royalty were at that moment converted into the signals of absolute dominion, and the instruments of irresistible power! The reed which they put into his hands became a *rod of iron*, with which he was to *break in pieces his enemies*; a sceptre, with which he was to rule the universe in righteousness. The cross, which they thought was to stigmatize him with infamy,

* John, xvi. 33.

† Gen. iii. 24.

became the ensign of his renown. Instead of being the reproach of his followers, it was to be their boast and their glory. The cross was to shine on palaces and churches, throughout the earth. It was to be assumed as the distinction of the most powerful monarchs, and to wave in the banner of victorious armies when the memory of Herod and Pilate should be accursed; when Jerusalem should be reduced to ashes, and the Jews be vagabonds over all the world.

These were the triumphs which commenced at this hour. Our Lord saw them already in their birth; he saw of the travail of his soul, and was satisfied. He beheld the word of God going forth, conquering, and to conquer; subduing, to the obedience of his laws, the subduers of the world; carrying light into the regions of darkness, and mildness into the habitations of cruelty. He beheld the Gentiles waiting below the cross, to receive the Gospel. He beheld *Ethiopia and the Isles stretching out their hands to God; the desert beginning to rejoice and to blossom as the rose; and the knowledge of the Lord filling the earth, as the waters cover the sea.* Well pleased, he said, *It is finished.* As a conqueror, he retired from the field, reviewing his triumphs: *He bowed his head, and gave up the Ghost.*—From that hour, Christ was no longer a mortal man, but *Head over all things to the Church*; the glorious King of men and angels, of whose dominion there shall be no end. His triumphs shall perpetually increase. *His name shall endure for ever; it shall last as long as the sun; men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed.*

SUCH were the transactions, such the effects of this ever-memorable hour. With all those great events was the mind of our Lord filled, when he lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, *Father; the hour is come.*

From this view which we have taken of this subject, permit me to suggest, what ground it affords to confide in the mercy of God, for the pardon of sin; to trust to his faithfulness, for the accomplishment of all his promises; and to approach to him, with gratitude and devotion, in acts of worship.

In the first place, The death of Christ affords us ground to confide in the Divine mercy for the pardon of sin. All the steps of that high dispensation of Providence, which we have considered, lead directly to this conclusion, *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?** This is the final result of the discoveries of the Gospel. On this rests that great system of consolation, which it hath reared up for men. We are not left to dubious and intricate reasonings, concerning the conduct which God may be expected to hold towards his offending creatures: But we are led to the view of important and illustrious facts, which strike the mind with evidence irresistible. For, is it possible to believe, that such great operations, as I have endeavoured to describe, were carried on by the Almighty in vain? Did he excite in the hearts of his creatures, such encouraging hopes, without any intention to fulfil them? After so long a preparation of goodness, could he mean to deny forgiveness to the penitent and the

* Rom. viii. 32.

humble? When, overcome by the sense of guilt, man looks up with an astonished eye to the justice of his Creator, let him recollect that hour of which the Text speaks, and be comforted. The signals of Divine mercy, erected in his view, are too conspicuous to be either distrusted or mistaken.

IN the next place, The discoveries of this hour afford the highest reason to trust in the Divine faithfulness, for the accomplishment of every promise which remains yet unfulfilled. For this was the hour of the completion of God's ancient covenant. It was the *performance of the mercy promised to the fathers*. We behold the consummation of a great plan, which, throughout a course of ages, had been uniformly pursued; and which, against every human appearance, was, at the appointed moment, exactly fulfilled. *No word that is gone out of the mouth of the Lord shall fail.* No length of time alters his purpose. No obstacles can retard it. Towards the ends accomplished in this hour, the most repugnant instruments were made to operate. We discern God bending to his purpose, the jarring passions, the opposite interests, and even the vices of men, uniting seeming contraries in his scheme; making *the wrath of man to praise him*; obliging the ambition of Princes, the prejudices of the Jews, the malice of Satan, all to concur, either in bringing forward this hour, or in completing its destined effects. With what entire confidence ought we to wait for the fulfilment of all his other promises in their due time; even when events are most embroiled, and the prospect is most discouraging? *Although thou sayest, Thou canst not see him; yet judgment is before him, therefore trust thou in him.* Be attentive only to perform thy duty; leave the event to God; and be assured, that under the direction of his Providence, *all things shall work together for a happy issue.*

LASTLY, The consideration of this whole subject tends to excite gratitude and devotion, when we approach to God in acts of worship. The hour of which I have discoursed, presents him to us in the amiable light of the Deliverer of mankind, the Restorer of our forfeited hopes. We behold the greatness of the Almighty, softened by the mild radiance of condescension and mercy. We behold him diminishing the awful distance at which we stand from his presence, by appointing for us a Mediator and Intercessor, through whom the humble may, without dismay, approach to Him who made them. By such views of the Divine nature, Christian faith lays the foundation for a worship which shall be at once rational and affectionate; a worship, in which the light of the understanding shall concur with the devotion of the heart, and the most profound reverence be united with the most cordial love. Christian faith is not a system of speculative truths. It is not a lesson of moral instruction only. By a train of high discoveries which it reveals, by a succession of interesting objects which it places in our view, it is calculated to elevate the mind, to purify the affections, and, by the assistance of devotion, to confirm and encourage virtue. Such, in particular, is the scope of that Divine institution, the Sacrament of our Lord's Supper. To this happy purpose, let it conduce, by concentrating, in one striking point of light,

all that the Gospel has displayed of what is most important to man. Touched with just contrition for past offences, and filled with a grateful sense of Divine goodness, let us come to the altar of God; and with a humble faith in his infinite mercies, devote ourselves to his service for ever.

SERMON VI.

ON GENTLENESS.

JAMES, iii. 17.

The wisdom that is from above, is—gentle—

To be wise in our own eyes, to be wise in the opinion of the world, and to be wise in the sight of God, are three things so very different, as rarely to coincide. One may often be wise in his own eyes, who is far from being so in the judgment of the world; and to be reputed a prudent man by the world, is no security for being accounted wise by God. As there is a worldly happiness, which God perceives to be no other than disguised misery; as there are worldly honours which, in his estimation, are reproach; so there is a worldly wisdom, which, in his sight, is foolishness. Of this worldly wisdom the characters are given in the context, and placed in contrast with those of the wisdom which is from above. The one is the wisdom of the crafty; the other, that of the upright. The one terminates in selfishness; the other, in charity. The one is full of strife and bitter envyings; the other, of mercy and of good fruits. One of the chief characters by which the wisdom from above is distinguished, is gentleness, of which I am now to discourse. Of this there is the greater occasion to discourse, because it is too seldom viewed in a religious light; and is more readily considered by the bulk of men, as a mere felicity of nature, or an exteriour accomplishment of manners, than as a Christian virtue, which they are bound to cultivate. I shall first explain the nature of this virtue; and shall then offer some arguments to recommend, and some directions to facilitate, the practice of it.

I BEGIN with distinguishing true gentleness from passive tameness of spirit, and from unlimited compliance with the manners of others. That passive tameness, which submits, without struggle, to every encroachment of the violent and assuming, forms no part of Christian duty; but, on the contrary, is destructive of general happiness and order. That unlimited complaisance, which, on every occasion, falls in with the opinions and manners of others, is so far from being a virtue, that it is itself a vice, and the parent of many vices. It overthrows all steadiness of principle; and produces that sinful conformity with the world which taints the whole character. In the present corrupted state of human manners, always to assent and to comply, is the very worst maxim we can adopt. It is impossible to support the purity and dignity of Christian morals, without opposing the

world on various occasions, even though we should stand alone. That gentleness, therefore, which belongs to virtue, is to be carefully distinguished from the mean spirit of cowards, and the fawning assent of sycophants. It renounces no just right from fear. It gives up no important truth from flattery. It is indeed not only consistent with a firm mind, but it necessarily requires a manly spirit, and a fixed principle, in order to give it any real value. Upon this solid ground only, the polish of gentleness can with advantage be superinduced.

It stands opposed, not to the most determined regard for virtue and truth, but to harshness and severity, to pride and arrogance, to violence and oppression. It is, properly, that part of the great virtue of charity, which makes us unwilling to give pain to any of our brethren. Compassion prompts us to relieve their wants. Forbearance prevents us from retaliating their injuries. Meekness restrains our angry passions; candour, our severe judgments. Gentleness corrects whatever is offensive in our manners; and, by a constant train of humane attentions, studies to alleviate the burden of common misery. Its office, therefore, is extensive. It is not, like some other virtues, called forth only on peculiar emergencies; but it is continually in action, when we are engaged in intercourse with men. It ought to form our address, to regulate our speech, and to diffuse itself over our whole behaviour.

I must warn you, however, not to confound this gentle wisdom which is from above, with that artificial courtesy, that studied smoothness of manners, which is learned in the school of the world. Such accomplishments, the most frivolous and empty may possess. Too often they are employed by the artful, as a snare; too often affected by the hard and unfeeling, as a cover to the baseness of their minds. We cannot, at the same time, avoid observing the homage which, even in such instances, the world is constrained to pay to virtue. In order to render society agreeable, it is found necessary to assume somewhat, that may at least carry its appearance. Virtue is the universal charm. Even its shadow is courted, when the substance is wanting. The imitation of its form has been reduced into an art; and, in the commerce of life, the first study of all who would either gain the esteem, or win the hearts of others, is to learn the speech, and to adopt the manners, of candour, gentleness, and humanity. But that gentleness, which is the characteristic of a good man, has, like every other virtue, its seat in the heart: And, let me add, nothing, except what flows from the heart, can render even external manners truly pleasing. For no assumed behaviour can at all times hide the real character. In that unaffected civility which springs from a gentle mind, there is a charm infinitely more powerful than in all the studied manners of the most finished courtier.

True gentleness is founded on a sense of what we owe to him who made us, and to the common nature of which we all share. It arises from reflection on our own failings and wants; and from just views of the condition, and the duty of man. It is native feeling, heightened and improved by principle. It is the heart which easily relents; which

feels for every thing that is human; and is backward and slow to inflict the least wound. It is affable in its address, and mild in its demeanour; ever ready to oblige, and willing to be obliged by others; breathing habitual kindness towards friends, courtesy to strangers, long-suffering to enemies. It exercises authority with moderation; administers reproof with tenderness; confers favours with ease and modesty. It is unassuming in opinion, and temperate in zeal. It contends not eagerly about trifles; is slow to contradict, and still slower to blame; but prompt to allay dissension, and to restore peace. It neither intermeddles unnecessarily with the affairs, nor pries inquisitively into the secrets of others. It delights above all things to alleviate distress, and, if it cannot dry up the falling tear, to sooth at least the grieving heart. Where it has not the power of being useful, it is never burdensome. It seeks to please, rather than to shine and dazzle; and conceals with care that superiority, either of talents or of rank, which is oppressive to those who are beneath it. In a word, it is that spirit, and that tenour of manners, which the gospel of Christ enjoins, when it commands us to *bear one another's burdens; to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep; to please every one his neighbour for his good; to be kind and tender-hearted; to be pitiful and courteous; to support the weak, and to be patient towards all men.*

Having now sufficiently explained the nature of this amiable virtue, I proceed to recommend it to your practice. Let me, for this end, desire you to consider the duty which you owe to God; to consider the relation which you bear one to another; to consider your own interest.

I. CONSIDER the duty which you owe to God. When you survey his works, nothing is so conspicuous as his greatness and majesty. When you consult his word, nothing is more remarkable, than his attention to soften that greatness, and to place it in the mildest and least oppressive light. He not only characterises himself as the *God of consolation*, but, with condescending gentleness, he particularly accommodates himself to the situation of the unfortunate. *He dwelleth with the humble and contrite. He hideth not his face when the afflicted cry. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds.* — When his Son came to be the Saviour of the world, he was eminent for the same attribute of mild and gentle goodness. Long before his birth, it was prophesied of him, that he should *not strive, nor cry, nor cause his voice to be heard in the streets; that the bruised reed he should not break; nor quench the smoking flax* *. And after his death, this distinguishing feature in his character was so universally remembered, that the Apostle Paul, on occasion of a request which he makes to the Corinthians, uses those remarkable expressions, *I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ*. † During all his intercourse with men, no harshness, or pride, or stately distance, appeared in his demeanour. In his access, he was easy; in his manners, simple; in his answers, mild; in his whole behaviour, humble and obliging. *Learn of me, said he, for I am meek, and lowly in heart.* — As the Son of God

* Matt. xii. 19, 20.

† 2 Cor. x. 1.

is the pattern, so the Holy Ghost is the inspirer of gentleness. His name is *the Comforter, the Spirit of Grace and Peace*. His *fruits*, or operations on the human mind, are *love, meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering*. * — Thus, by every discovery of the Godhead, honour is conferred upon gentleness. It is held up to our view, as peculiarly connected with Celestial Nature. And suitable to such discoveries, is the whole strain of the Gospel. It were unnecessary to appeal to any single precept. You need only open the New Testament, to find this virtue perpetually inculcated. Charity, or love, is the capital figure ever presented to our view; and gentleness, forbearance, and forgiveness, are the sounds ever recurring on our ear.

So predominant, indeed, is this spirit throughout the Christian dispensation, that even the vices and corruptions of men have not been able altogether to defeat its tendency. Though that dispensation is far from having hitherto produced its full effect upon the world, yet we can clearly trace its influence in humanizing the manners of men. Remarkable, in this respect, is the victory which it has gained over those powers of violence and cruelty which belong to the infernal kingdom. Wherever Christianity prevails, it has discouraged, and, in some degree, abolished slavery. It has rescued human nature from that ignominious yoke, under which, in former ages, the one half of mankind groaned. It has introduced more equality between the two sexes, and rendered the conjugal union more rational and happy. It has abated the ferociousness of war. It has mitigated the rigour of despotism, mitigated the cruelty of punishment; in a word, has reduced mankind from their ancient barbarity, into a more humane and gentle state. — Do we pretend respect and zeal for this religion, and at the same time allow ourselves in that harshness and severity, which are so contradictory to its genius? Too plainly we show, that it has no power over our hearts. We may retain the Christian name; but we have abandoned the Christian spirit.

II. CONSIDER the relation which you bear to one another. Man, as a solitary individual, is a very wretched being. As long as he stands detached from his kind, he is possessed, neither of happiness, nor of strength. We are formed by nature to unite; we are impelled towards each other, by the compassionate instincts in our frame; we are linked by a thousand connections, founded on common wants. Gentleness, therefore, or, as it is very properly termed, humanity, is what man, as such, in every station, owes to man. To be inaccessible, contemptuous, and hard of heart, is to revolt against our own nature; is, in the language of Scripture, *to hide ourselves from our own flesh*. Accordingly, as all feel the claim which they have to mildness and humanity, so all are sensibly hurt by the want of it in others. On no side are we more vulnerable. No complaint is more feelingly made, than that of the harsh and rugged manners of persons with whom we have intercourse. But how seldom do we transfer the cause to ourselves, or examine how far we are guilty of inflicting on others, whose sensibility is the same with ours, those very wounds of which we so loudly complain?

* Gal. v. 22.

But, perhaps, it will be pleaded by some, That this gentleness, on which we now insist, regards only those smaller offices of life, which in their eye are not essential to religion and goodness. Negligent, they confess, on slight occasions, of the government of their temper, or the regulation of their behaviour, they are attentive, as they pretend, to the great duties of beneficence; and ready, whenever the opportunity presents, to perform important services to their fellow-creatures. But let such persons reflect, that the occasions of performing those important good deeds very rarely occur. Perhaps their situation in life, or the nature of their connections, may, in a great measure, exclude them from such opportunities. Great events give scope for great virtues; but the main tenour of human life is composed of small occurrences. Within the round of these, lie the materials of the happiness of most men; the subjects of their duty, and the trials of their virtue. Virtue must be formed and supported, not by unfrequent acts, but by daily and repeated exertions. In order to its becoming either vigorous or useful, it must be habitually active: not breaking forth occasionally with a transient lustre, like the blaze of the comet; but regular in its returns, like the light of day: Not like the aromatic gale, which sometimes feasts the sense; but, like the ordinary breeze, which purifies the air, and renders it healthful:

Years may pass over our heads, without affording any opportunity for acts of high beneficence, or extensive utility. Whereas not a day passes, but, in the common transactions of life, and especially in the intercourse of domestic society, gentleness finds place for promoting the happiness of others, and for strengthening in ourselves the habit of virtue. Nay, by seasonable discoveries of a humane spirit, we sometimes contribute more materially to the advancement of happiness, than by actions which are seemingly more important. There are situations, not a few, in human life, where the encouraging reception, the condescending behaviour, and the look of sympathy, bring greater relief to the heart than the most bountiful gift. While, on the other side, when the hand of liberality is extended to bestow, the want of gentleness is sufficient to frustrate the intention of the benefit. We sour those whom we mean to oblige; and, by conferring favours with ostentation and harshness, we convert them into injuries. Can any disposition, then, be held to possess a low place in the scale of virtue, whose influence is so considerable on the happiness of the world?

Gentleness is, in truth, the great avenue to mutual enjoyment. Amidst the strife of interfering interests, it tempers the violence of contention, and keeps alive the seeds of harmony. It softens animosities; renews endearments; and renders the countenance of man a refreshment to man. Banish gentleness from the earth; suppose the world to be filled with none but harsh and contentious spirits; and what sort of society would remain? the solitude of the desert were preferable to it. The conflict of jarring elements in chaos; the cave, where subterraneous winds contend and roar; the den, where serpents hiss, and beasts of the forest howl; would be the only proper representations of such assemblies of men. — *Oh, that I had wings like a dove! for*

then I would fly away, and be at rest. Lo! then I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness; I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest: For I have seen violence and strife in the city. Mischief and sorrow are in the midst of it: Deceit and guile depart not from her streets.* — Strange! that where men have all one common interest, they should so often absurdly concur in defeating it! Has not Nature already provided a sufficient quantity of unavoidable evils for the state of man? As if we did not suffer enough from the storm which beats upon us without, must we conspire also, in those societies where we assemble, in order to find a retreat from that storm, to harass one another? — But if the sense of duty, and of common happiness, be insufficient to recommend the virtue of which we treat, then let me desire you,

III. To consider your own interest. Whatever ends a good man can be supposed to pursue, gentleness will be found to favour them. It prepossesses and wins every heart. It persuades, when every other argument fails; often disarms the fierce, and melts the stubborn. Whereas harshness confirms the opposition it would subdue; and, of an indifferent person, creates an enemy. He who could overlook an injury committed in the collision of interests, will long and severely resent the slights of a contemptuous behaviour. — To the man of gentleness, the world is generally disposed to ascribe every other good quality. The higher endowments of the mind we admire at a distance, and when any impropriety of behaviour accompanies them, we admire without love. They are like some of the distant stars, whose beneficial influence reaches not to us. Whereas of the influence of gentleness, all in some degree partake, and therefore all love it. The man of this character rises in the world without struggle, and flourishes without envy. His misfortunes are universally lamented; and his failings are easily forgiven.

But whatever may be the effect of this virtue on our external condition, its influence on our internal enjoyment is certain and powerful. That inward tranquillity which it promotes, is the first requisite to every pleasurable feeling. It is the calm and clear atmosphere, the serenity and sunshine of the mind. When benignity and gentleness reign within, we are always least in hazard of being ruffled from without; every person, and every occurrence, are beheld in the most favourable light. But let some clouds of disgust and ill-humour gather on the mind; and immediately the scene changes. Nature seems transformed; and the appearance of all things is blackened to our view. The gentle mind is like the smooth stream, which reflects every object in its just proportion, and in its fairest colours. The violent spirit, like troubled waters, renders back the images of things distorted and broken; and communicates to them all that disordered motion which arises solely from its own agitation.

Offences must come. As soon may the waves of the sea cease to roll, as provocations to arise from human corruption and frailty. Attacked by great injuries, the man of mild and gentle spirit will feel what human nature feels; and will defend and resent, as his duty

* Psal. lv. 6—11.

allows him. But to those slight provocations, and frivolous offences, which are the most frequent causes of disquiet, he is happily superior. Hence his days flow in a far more placid tenour than those of others; exempted from the numberless discomposures which agitate vulgar minds. Inspired with higher sentiments; taught to regard with indulgent eye the frailties of men, the omissions of the careless, the follies of the imprudent, and the levity of the fickle, he retreats into the calmness of his spirit, as into an undisturbed sanctuary; and quietly allows the usual current of life to hold its course.

This virtue has another, and still more important, connection with our interest, by means of that relation which our present behaviour bears to our eternal state. Heaven is the region of gentleness and friendship: Hell, of fierceness and animosity. If then, as the Scripture instructs us, *according to what we now sow, we must hereafter reap*; it follows, that the cultivation of a gentle temper is necessary to prepare us for heavenly felicity, and that the indulgence of harsh dispositions is the introduction to future misery. Men, I am afraid, too often separate those articles of their belief which relate to eternity, from the ordinary affairs of the world. They connect them with the seasons of seriousness and gravity. They leave them with much respect, as in a high region, to which, only on great occasions, they resort; and when they descend into common life, consider themselves as at liberty to give free scope to their humours and passions. Whereas, in fact, it is their behaviour in the daily train of social intercourse, which, more than any other cause, fixes and determines their spiritual character; gradually instilling those dispositions, and forming those habits, which affect their everlasting condition. With regard to trifles, perhaps their malignant dispositions may chiefly be indulged. But let them remember well, that those trifles, by increasing the growth of peevishness and passion, become pregnant with the most serious mischiefs; and may fit them, before they are aware, for being the future companions of none but infernal spirits.

I mean not to say, that, in order to our preparation for Heaven, it is enough to be mild and gentle; or that this virtue alone will cover all our sins. Through the felicity of natural constitution, a certain degree of this benignity may be possessed by some, whose hearts are in other respects corrupt, and their lives irregular. But what I mean to assert is, That where no attention is given to the government of temper, meetness for heaven is not yet acquired, and the regenerating power of religion is as yet unknown. One of the first works of the Spirit of God is, to infuse into every heart which it inhabits, that *gentle wisdom which is from above*. *They who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its affections and lusts*; but let it not be forgotten, that among the works of the flesh, *hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, and envyings*, are as expressly enumerated, as *uncleanness, murders, drunkenness, and revelling*.^{*} They who continue either in the one or the other, *shall not inherit*, indeed cannot inherit, *the kingdom of God*.

Having thus shown the importance of gentleness, both as a moral virtue, and as a Christian grace, I shall conclude the subject, with

* Gal. v. 19, 20, 21.

briefly suggesting some considerations which may be of use to facilitate the practice of it.

For this end, let me advise you to view your character with an impartial eye; and to learn from your own failings, to give that indulgence which in your turn you claim. It is pride which fills the world with so much harshness and severity. In the fulness of self-estimation, we forget what we are. We claim attentions to which we are not entitled. We are rigorous to offences, as if we had never offended; unfeeling to distress, as if we knew not what it was to suffer. From those airy regions of pride and folly, let us descend to our proper level. Let us survey the natural equality on which Providence has placed man with man, and reflect on the infirmities common to all. If the reflection on natural equality and mutual offences be insufficient to prompt humanity, let us at least remember what we are in the sight of God. Have we none of that forbearance to give to one another, which we all so earnestly intreat from Heaven? Can we look for clemency or gentleness from our Judge, when we are so backward to show it to our own brethren?

Accustom yourselves also to reflect on the small moment of those things which are the usual incentives to violence and contention. In the ruffled and angry hour, we view every appearance through a false medium. The most inconsiderable point of interest, or honour, swells into a momentous object; and the slightest attack seems to threaten immediate ruin. But after passion or pride has subsided, we look round in vain for the mighty mischiefs we dreaded. The fabric, which our disturbed imagination had reared, totally disappears. But, though the cause of contention has dwindled away, its consequences remain. We have alienated a friend, we have embittered an enemy; we have sown the seeds of future suspicion, malevolence, or disgust.—Suspend your violence, I beseech you, for a moment, when causes of discord occur. Anticipate that period of coolness, which, of itself, will soon arrive. Allow yourselves to think, how little you have any prospect of gaining by fierce contention; but how much of the true happiness of life you are certain of throwing away. Easily, and from the smallest chink, the bitter waters of strife are let forth; but their course cannot be foreseen; and he seldom fails of suffering most from their poisonous effect, who first allowed them to flow.

But gentleness will, most of all, be promoted by frequent views of those great objects which our holy religion presents. Let the prospects of immortality fill your minds. Look upon this world as a state of passage. Consider yourselves as engaged in the pursuit of higher interests; as acting now, under the eye of God, an introductory part to a more important scene. Elevated by such sentiments, your minds will become calm and sedate. You will look down, as from a superiour station, on the petty disturbances of the world. They are the selfish, the sensual, and the vain, who are most subject to the impotence of passion. They are linked so closely to the world; by so many sides they touch every object, and every person around them, that they are perpetually hurt, and perpetually hurting:—

others. But the spirit of true religion removes us to a proper distance from the grating objects of worldly contention. It leaves us sufficiently connected with the world for acting our part in it with propriety; but disengages us from it so far, as to weaken its power of disturbing our tranquillity. It inspires magnanimity; and magnanimity always breathes gentleness. It leads us to view the follies of men with pity, not with rancour; and to treat, with the mildness of a superiour nature, what in little minds would call forth all the bitterness of passion.

Aided by such considerations, let us cultivate that gentle wisdom which is, in so many respects, important both to our duty and our happiness. Let us assume it as the ornament of every age, and of every station. Let it temper the petulance of youth, and soften the moroseness of old age. Let it mitigate authority in those who rule, and promote deference among those who obey. I conclude with repeating the caution, not to mistake for true gentleness, that flimsy imitation of it called polished manners, which often, among men of the world, under a smooth appearance, conceals much asperity. Let yours be native gentleness of heart, flowing from the love of God, and the love of man. Unite this amiable spirit with a proper zeal for all that is right, and just, and true. Let piety be combined in your character with humanity. Let determined integrity dwell in a mild and gentle breast. A character thus supported, will command more real respect, than can be procured by the most shining accomplishments, when separated from virtue.

SERMON VII.

ON THE DISORDERS OF THE PASSIONS.

ESTHER, v. 13.

Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate.

THESE are the words of one, who, though high in station and power, confessed himself to be miserable. They relate to a memorable occurrence in the Persian history, under the reign of Ahasuerus, who is supposed to be the Prince known among the Greek historians by the name of Artaxerxes. Ahasuerus had advanced, to the chief dignity in his kingdom, Haman, an Amalekite, who inherited all the ancient enmity of his race to the Jewish nation. He appears, from what is recorded of him, to have been a very wicked minister. Raised to greatness without merit, he employed his power solely for the gratification of his passions. As the honours which he possessed were next to royal, his pride was every day fed with that servile homage which is peculiar to Asiatic courts; and all the servants of the King prostrated themselves before him. In the midst of this general adulation, one person only stooped not to Haman. This

was Mordecai the Jew; who, knowing this Amalekite to be an enemy to the people of God, and, with virtuous indignation, despising that insolence of prosperity with which he saw him lifted up, bowed not, nor did him reverence. On this appearance of disrespect from Mordecai, Haman was full of wrath; but he thought scorn to lay hands on Mordecai alone. Personal revenge was not sufficient to satisfy him. So violent and black were his passions, that he resolved to exterminate the whole nation to which Mordecai belonged. Abusing, for this cruel purpose, the favour of his credulous Sovereign, he obtained a decree to be sent forth, that, against a certain day, all the Jews throughout the Persian dominions should be put to the sword. Meanwhile, confident of success, and blind to approaching ruin, he continued exulting in his prosperity. Invited by Ahasuerus to a royal banquet, which Esther the Queen had prepared, he went forth that day joyful, and with a glad heart. But behold how slight an incident was sufficient to poison his joy! As he went forth, he saw Mordecai in the King's gate; and observed, that still he refused to do him homage. He stood not up, nor was moved for him; although he well knew the formidable designs which Haman was preparing to execute. One private man, who despised his greatness, and disdained submissiion, while a whole kingdom trembled before him; one spirit, which the utmost stretch of his power could neither subdue nor humble, blasted his triumphs. His whole soul was shaken with a storm of passion. Wrath, pride, and desire of revenge, rose into fury. With difficulty he restrained himself in public; but as soon as he came to his own house, he was forced to disclose the agony of his mind. He gathered together his friends and family, with Zerish his wife. He told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the King had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the King. He said, moreover, Yea, Esther the Queen did let no man come in with the King unto the banquet that she had prepared, but myself; and to-morrow also am I invited unto her with the King. — After all this preamble, what is the conclusion? — Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate.

The sequel of Haman's history I shall not now pursue. It might afford matter for much instruction, by the conspicuous justice of God in his fall and punishment. But, contemplating only the singular situation in which the Text presents him, and the violent agitation of his mind which it displays, the following reflections naturally arise, which, together with some practical improvements, shall make the subject of this discourse. I. How miserable is vice, when one guilty passion creates so much torment! II. How unavailing is prosperity, when, in the height of it, a single disappointment can destroy the relish of all its pleasures! III. How weak is human nature, which, in the absence of real, is thus prone to form to itself imaginary woes!

• I. How miserable is vice, when one guilty passion is capable of creating so much torment! When we discourse to you of the internal misery of sinners; when we represent the pangs which they suffer from violent passions and a corrupted heart; we are sometimes sus-

pected of chusing a theme for declamation, and of heightening the picture which we draw, by colours borrowed from fancy. They whose minds are, by nature, happily tranquil, or whose situation in life removes them from the disturbance and tumult of passion, can hardly conceive, that as long as the body is at ease, and the external condition prosperous, any thing which passes within the mind should cause such exquisite woe. But, for the truth of our assertions, we appeal to the history of mankind. We might reason from the constitution of the rational frame; where the understanding is appointed to be supreme, and the passions to be subordinate; and where, if this due arrangement of its parts be overthrown, misery necessarily ensues, as pain is consequent in the animal frame upon the distortion of its members. But laying speculations of this kind aside, it is sufficient to lead you to the view of facts, the import of which can neither be controverted, nor mistaken. This is, indeed, the great advantage of history, that it is a mirror which holds up mankind to their own view. For, in all ages, human nature has been the same. In the circle of worldly affairs, the same characters and situations are perpetually returning; and in the follies and passions, the vices and crimes, of the generations that are past, we read those of the present.

Attend, then, to the instance now before us; and conceive, if you can, a person more thoroughly wretched, than one reduced to make this humiliating confession, that, though surrounded with power, opulence, and pleasure, he was lost to all happiness, through the fierceness of his resentment; and was, at that moment, stung by disappointment, and torn by rage, beyond what he could bear. *All this avoulet me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate.* Had this been a soliloquy of Haman's within himself, it would have been a sufficient discovery of his misery. But when we consider it as a confession which he makes to others, it is a proof that his misery was become insupportable. For, such agitations of the mind every man strives to conceal, because he knows they dishonour him. Other griefs and sorrows, he can, with freedom, pour out to a confidant. What he suffers from the injustice or malice of the world, he is not ashamed to acknowledge. But when his suffering arises from the bad dispositions of his own heart; when, in the height of prosperity, he is rendered miserable, solely by disappointed pride, every ordinary motive for communication ceases. Nothing but the violence of anguish can drive him to confess a passion which renders him odious, and a weakness which renders him despicable. To what extremity, in particular, must he be reduced, before he can disclose to his own family the infamous secret of his misery? In the eye of his family every man wishes to appear respectable, and to cover from their knowledge whatever may vilify or degrade him. Attacked or reproached abroad, he consoles himself with his importance at home; and in domestic attachment and respect, seeks for some compensation for the injustice of the world. Judge, then, of the degree of torment which Haman endured, by its breaking through all these restraints, and forcing him to publish his shame before those from whom all men seek most to hide it. How severe must have been the conflict

which he underwent within himself, before he called together his wife and all his friends for this purpose! How dreadful the agony he suffered at the moment of his confession, when, to the astonished company, he laid open the cause of his distress!

Assemble all the evils which poverty, disease, or violence can inflict, and their stings will be found by far less pungent, than those which such guilty passions dart into the heart. Amidst the ordinary calamities of the world, the mind can exert its powers, and suggest relief: And the mind is properly the man; the sufferer, and his sufferings, can be distinguished. But those disorders of passion, by seizing directly on the mind, attack human nature in its strong hold, and cut off its last resource. They penetrate to the very seat of sensation; and convert all the powers of thought into instruments of torture.

Let us remark, in the event that is now before us, the awful hand of God; and admire his justice, in thus making the sinner's *own wickedness to reprove him, and his backslidings to correct him*. Sceptics reason in vain against the reality of divine government. It is not a subject of dispute. It is a fact which carries the evidence of sense, and displays itself before our eyes. We see the Almighty manifestly *pursuing the sinner with evil*. We see him connecting with every single deviation from duty, those wounds of the spirit which occasion the most exquisite torments. He hath not merely promulgated his laws now, and delayed the distribution of rewards and punishments until a future period of being. But the sanctions of his laws already take place; their effects appear; and with such infinite wisdom are they contrived, as to require no other executioners of justice against the sinner, than his own guilty passions. God needs not come forth from his secret place, in order to bring him to punishment. He needs not call thunder down from the heavens, nor raise any ministers of wrath from the abyss below. He needs only say, *Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone*: And, at that instant, the sinner becomes his own tormentor. The infernal fire begins, of itself, to kindle within him. The worm that never dies, seizes on his heart.

Let us remark, also, from this example, how imperfectly we can judge, from external appearances, concerning real happiness or misery. All Persia, it is probable, envied Haman as the happiest person in the empire; while yet, at the moment of which we now treat, there was not, within its bounds, one more thoroughly wretched. We are seduced and deceived by that false glare which prosperity sometimes throws around bad men. We are tempted to imitate their crimes, in order to partake of their imagined felicity. But remember Haman, and beware of the snare. Think not, when you behold a pageant of grandeur displayed to public view, that you discern the ensign of certain happiness. In order to form any just conclusion, you must follow the great man into the retired apartment, where he lays aside his disguise; you must not only be able to penetrate into the interior of families, but you must have a faculty by which you can look into the inside of hearts. Were you endowed with such a power, you would most commonly behold good men, in proportion

to their goodness, satisfied and easy; you would behold atrocious sinners always restless and unhappy.

Unjust are our complaints of the promiscuous distribution made by Providence, of its favours among men. From superficial views such complaints arise. The distribution of the goods of fortune, indeed, may often be promiscuous; that is, disproportioned to the moral characters of men: but the allotment of real happiness is never so. *For to the wicked there is no peace. They are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. They travel with pain all their days. Trouble and anguish prevail against them. Terrours make them afraid on every side. A dreadful sound is in their ears; and they are in great fear where no fear is.* — Hitherto we have considered Haman under the character of a very wicked man, tormented by criminal passions. Let us now consider him merely as a child of fortune, a prosperous man of the world; and proceed to observe,

II. How unavailing worldly prosperity is, since, in the midst of it, a single disappointment is sufficient to embitter all its pleasures. We might at first imagine, that the natural effect of prosperity would be, to diffuse over the mind a prevailing satisfaction, which the lesser evils of life could not ruffle or disturb. We might expect, that as one in the full glow of health, despises the inclemency of weather; so one in possession of all the advantages of high power and station, should disregard slight injuries; and, at perfect ease with himself, should view, in the most favourable light, the behavior of others around him. Such effects would indeed follow, if worldly prosperity contained in itself the true principles of human felicity. But as it possesses them not, the very reverse of those consequences generally obtains. Prosperity debilitates, instead of strengthening the mind. Its most common effect is, to create an extreme sensibility to the slightest wound. It fomenters impatient desires; and raises expectations which no success can satisfy. It fosters a false delicacy, which sickens in the midst of indulgence. By repeated gratification, it blunts the feelings of men to what is pleasing; and leaves them unhappily acute to whatever is uneasy. Hence, the gale, which another would scarcely feel, is, to the prosperous, a rude tempest. Hence, the rose-leaf doubled below them on the couch, as it is told of the effeminate Sybarite breaks their rest. Hence, the disrespect shown by Mordecai, preyed with such violence on the heart of Haman. Upon no principle of reason can we assign a sufficient cause for all the distress which this incident occasioned to him. The cause lay not in the external incident. It lay within himself; it arose from a mind distempered by prosperity.

Let this example correct that blind eagerness, with which we rush to the chase of worldly greatness and honours. I say not, that it should altogether divert us from pursuing them; since, when enjoyed with temperance and wisdom, they may doubtless both enlarge our utility, and contribute to our comfort. But let it teach us not to over-rate them. Let it convince us, that unless we add to them the necessary correctives of piety and virtue, they are, by themselves, more likely to render us wretched, than to make us happy.

Let the memorable fate of Haman suggest to us also, how often, besides corrupting the mind and engendering internal misery, they lead us among precipices, and betray us into ruin. At the moment when fortune seemed to smile upon him with the most serene and settled aspect, she was digging in secret the pit for his fall. Prosperity was weaving around his head the web of destruction. Success inflamed his pride; pride increased his thirst of revenge; the revenge which, for the sake of one man, he sought to execute on a whole nation, incensed the Queen; and he is doomed to suffer the same death which he had prepared for Mordecai. — Had Haman remained in a private station, he might have arrived at a peaceable old age. He might have been, I shall not say a good or a happy man, yet probably far less guilty, and less wretched, than when placed at the head of the greatest empire in the East. *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life? all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as*

An excessive contemplation of human affairs will lead us to this conclusion, That, among the different conditions and ranks of men, the balance of happiness is preserved in a great measure equal; and that the high and the low, the rich and the poor, approach, in point of real enjoyment, much nearer to each other, than is commonly imagined. In the lot of man, mutual compensations, both of pleasure and of pain, universal & take place. Providence never intended, that any state here should be either completely happy or entirely miserable. If the feelings of pleasure are more numerous, and more lively, in the higher departments of life, such also are those of pain. If greatness flatters or vanities, it multiplies our dangers. If opulence increases our gratifications, it increases, in the same proportion, our desires and demands. If the poor are confined to a more narrow circle, yet within that circle lie most of those natural satisfactions, which, after all the refinements of art, are found to be the most genuine and true. — In a state, therefore, where there is neither so much to be coveted on the one hand, nor to be dreaded on the other, as at first appears, how submissive ought we to be to the disposal of Providence! How temperate in our desires and pursuits! How much more attentive to preserve our virtue, and to improve our minds, than to gain the doubtful and equivocal advantages of worldly prosperity! — But now, laying aside the consideration of Haman's great crimes; laying aside his high prosperity; viewing him simply as a man; let us observe, from his history,

III. How weak human nature is, which, in the absence of real, is thus prone to create to itself imaginary woes. *All this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the King's gate.* — What was it, O Haman! to thee, though Mordecai had continued to sit there and neglected to do thee homage? Would the banquet have been on that account the less magnificent, thy palace less splendid, or thy retinue less numerous? Could the disrespect of an obscure stranger dishonour the favourite of a mighty King? In the midst of a thousand submissive courtiers, was the sullen countenance an object worthy of drawing thy notice, or of troubling thy

repose? — Alas! in Haman we behold too just a picture of what often passes within ourselves. We never know what it is to be long at ease. Let the world cease from changing around us: let external things keep that situation in which we most wish them to remain; yet somewhat from within shall soon arise, to disturb our happiness. A *Mordecai* appears, or seems to appear, *sitting at the gate*. Some vexation, which our fancy has either entirely created, or at least has unreasonably aggravated, corrodes us in secret; and, until that be removed, all that we enjoy *availeth us nothing*. Thus, while we are incessantly complaining of the vanity and the evils of human life, we make that vanity, and we increase those evils. Unskilled in the art of extracting happiness from the objects around us, our ingenuity solely appears in converting them into misery.

Let it not be thought, that troubles of this kind are incident only to the great and the mighty. Though they, perhaps, from the intemperance of their passions, are peculiarly exposed to them; yet the disease itself belongs to human nature, and spreads through all ranks. In the humble and seemingly quiet shade of private life, discontent broods over its imaginary sorrows; preys upon the citizen, no less than upon the courtier; and often nourishes passions equally malignant in the cottage and in the palace. Having once seized the mind, it spreads its own gloom over every surrounding object; it everywhere searches out materials for itself; and in no direction more frequently employs its unhappy activity, than in creating divisions amongst mankind, and in magnifying slight provocations into mortal injuries. Those self-created miseries, imaginary in the cause, but real in the suffering, will be found to form a proportion of human evils, not inferior, either in severity or in number, to all that we endure from the unavoidable calamities of life. In situations where much comfort might be enjoyed, this man's superiority, and that man's neglect, our jealousy of a friend, our hatred of a rival, an imagined affront, or a mistaken point of honour, allow us no repose. Hence, discords in families, animosities among friends, and wars among nations. Hence, Haman miserable in the midst of all that greatness could bestow. Hence, multitudes in the most obscure stations, for whom Providence seemed to have prepared a quiet life, no less eager in their petty broils, nor less tormented by their passions, than if princely honours were the prize for which they contended.

From this train of observation, which the Text has suggested, can we avoid reflecting upon the disorder in which human nature plainly appears at present to lie? We have beheld, in Haman, the picture of that misery which arises from evil passions; of that unhappiness, which is incident to the highest prosperity; of that discontent, which is common to every state. Whether we consider him as a bad man, a prosperous man, or simply as a man, in every light we behold reason too weak for passion. This is the source of the reigning evil; this is the root of the universal disease. The story of Haman only shows us, what human nature has too generally appeared to be in every age. Hence, when we read the history of nations, what do we read but the history of the follies and crimes of men? We may

dignify those recorded transactions, by calling them the intrigues of statesmen, and the exploits of conquerours; but they are, in truth, no other than the efforts of discontent to escape from its misery, and the struggles of contending passions among unhappy men. The history of mankind has ever been a continued tragedy; the world a great theatre exhibiting the same repeated scene, of the follies of men shooting forth into guilt, and of their passions fermenting, by a quick process, into misery.

But can we believe, that the nature of man came forth in this state from the hands of its gracious Creator? Did he frame this world, and store it with inhabitants, solely that it might be replenished with crimes and misfortunes?—In the moral, as well as in the natural world, we may plainly discern the signs of some violent convulsion, which has shattered the original workmanship of the Almighty. Amidst this wreck of human nature, traces still remain which indicate its Author. Those high powers of conscience and reason, that capacity for happiness, that ardour of enterprise, that glow of affection, which often break through the gloom of human vanity and guilt, are like the scattered columns, the broken arches, and defaced sculptures of some fallen temple, whose ancient splendour appears amidst its ruins. So conspicuous in human nature are those characters, both of a high origin, and of a degraded state, that by many religious sects throughout the earth, they have been seen and confessed. A tradition seems to have pervaded almost all nations, that the human race had, either through some offence forfeited, or through some misfortune lost, that station of primæval honour which they once possessed. But while from this doctrine, ill understood, and involved in many fabulous tales, the nations wandering in Pagan darkness could draw no consequences that were just; while totally ignorant of the nature of the disease, they sought in vain for the remedy; the same divine revelation, which has informed us in what manner our apostacy arose from the abuse of our rational powers, has instructed us also how we may be restored to virtue and to happiness.

LET us, therefore, study to improve the assistance which this revelation affords for the restoration of our nature, and the recovery of our felicity. With humble and grateful minds, let us apply to those medicinal springs which it hath opened, for curing the disorders of our heart and passions. In this view, let us, with reverence, look up to that Divine Personage, who descended into this world, on purpose to be *the light and the life of men*; who came in the fulness of grace and truth, to *repair the desolation of many generations*, to restore order among the works of God, and to raise up a *new earth and new heavens, wherein righteousness should dwell for ever*. Under his tuition let us put ourselves; and amidst the storms of passion to which we are here exposed, and the slippery paths which we are left to tread, never trust presumptuously to our own understanding. Thankful that a Heavenly Conductor vouchsafes his aid, let us earnestly pray, that from him may descend divine light to guide our steps, and divine strength to fortify our minds. Let us pray, that his grace may keep

us from all intemperate passions, and mistaken pursuits of pleasure, that whether it shall be his will to give or to deny us earthly prosperity, he may bless us with a calm, a sound, and well-regulated mind; may give us moderation in success, and fortitude under disappointment; and may enable us so to take warning from the crimes and miseries of others, as to escape the snares of guilt.

WHILE we thus maintain a due dependence on God, let us also exert ourselves with care in acting our own part. From the whole of what has been said, this important instruction arises, that the happiness of every man depends more upon the state of his own mind, than upon any one external circumstance; nay, more than upon all external things put together. We have seen, that inordinate passions are the great disturbers of life; and that, unless we possess a good conscience, and a well-governed mind, discontent will blast every enjoyment, and the highest prosperity will prove only disguised misery. Fix then this conclusion in your minds, that the destruction of your virtue is the destruction of your peace. *Keep thy heart with all diligence; govern it with the greatest care; for out of it are the issues of life.* In no station, in no period, think yourselves secure from the dangers which spring from your passions. Every age and every station they beset; from youth to grey hairs, and from the peasant to the prince.

At your first setting out in life, especially when yet unacquainted with the world and its snares, when every pleasure enchants with its smile, and every object shines with the gloss of novelty; beware of the seducing appearances which surround you, and recollect what others have suffered from the power of headstrong desire. If you allow any passion, even though it be esteemed innocent, to acquire an absolute ascendant, your inward peace will be impaired. But if any which has the taint of guilt, take early possession of your mind, you may date from that moment the ruin of your tranquillity. Nor with the season of youth does the peril end. To the impetuosity of youthful desire, succeed the more sober, but no less dangerous attachments of advancing years; when the passions which are connected with interest and ambition begin their reign, and too frequently extend their malignant influence, even over those periods of life which ought to be most tranquil. From the first to the last of man's abode on earth, the discipline must never be relaxed, of guarding the heart from the dominion of passion. Eager passions, and violent desires, were not made for man. They exceed his sphere. They find no adequate objects on earth; and of course can be productive of nothing but misery. The certain consequence of indulging them is, that there shall come an evil day, when the anguish of disappointment shall drive us to acknowledge, that all which we enjoy *availeth us nothing.*

You are not to imagine, that the warnings which I have given in this Discourse, are applicable only to the case of such signal offenders as he was, of whom the Text treats. Think not, as I am afraid too many do, that because your passions have not hurried you into atrocious deeds, they have therefore wrought no mischief, and have left no sting behind them. By a continued series of loose, though ap-

parently trivial gratifications, the heart is often as thoroughly corrupted, as by the commission of any one of those enormous crimes which spring from great ambition, or great revenge. Habit gives the passions strength, while the absence of glaring guilt seemingly justifies them; and, unawakened by remorse, the sinner proceeds in his course, till he wax bold in guilt, and become ripe for ruin. For by gradual and latent steps, the destruction of our virtue advances. Did the evil unveil itself at the beginning; did the storm which is to overthrow our peace, discover, as it rose, all its horrors, precautions would more frequently be taken against it. But we are imperceptibly betrayed; and from one licentious attachment, one criminal passion, are, by a train of consequences, drawn on to another, till the government of our minds is irrecoverably lost. The enticing and the odious passions are, in this respect, similar in their process; and, though by different roads, conduct at last to the same issue. David, when he first beheld Bathsheba, did not plan the death of Uriah. Haman was not delivered up all at once to the madness of revenge. His passions rose with the rising tide of prosperity; and pride completed what prosperity began. What was originally no more than displeasure at Mordecai's disrespect, increased with every invitation he received to the banquet of the Queen; till it impelled him to devise the slaughter of a whole nation, and ended in a degree of rage which confounded his reason, and hurried him to ruin. In this manner, every criminal passion, in its progress, swells and blackens; and what was at first a small cloud, such as the prophet's servant saw, *no bigger than a man's hand rising from the sea**, is soon found to carry the tempest in its womb.

SERMON VIII.

ON OUR IGNORANCE OF GOOD AND EVIL IN THIS LIFE.

ECCLES. vi. 12.

Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?

THE measure according to which knowledge is dispensed to man, affords conspicuous proofs of divine wisdom. In many instances we clearly perceive, that either more or less would have proved detrimental to his state; that entire ignorance would have deprived him of proper motives to action; and that complete discovery would have raised him to a sphere too high for his present powers. He is, therefore, permitted to *know only in part; and to see through a glass, darkly*. He is left in that state of conjecture, and partial information, which, though it may occasionally subject him to distress, yet, on the whole, conduces most to his improvement; which affords him knowledge sufficient for the purposes of virtue, and of active life, without disturb-

* 1 Kings, xviii. 44.

ing the operations of his mind, by a light, bright and dazzling. This evidently holds with respect to that degree of obscurity which now covers the great laws of Nature, the decrees of the Supreme Being, the state of the invisible world, the future events of our own life, and the thoughts and designs which pass within the breasts of others. *

But there is an ignorance of another kind, with respect to which the application of this remark may appear more dubious; the ignorance under which men labour concerning their happiness in the present life, and the means of obtaining it. If there be foundation for Solomon's complaint in the Text, *who knoweth what is good for man in this life?* this consequence may be thought inevitably to follow, that the *days of his life* must be *vain* in every sense; not only because they are fleeting, but because they are empty too, like the *shadow*. For to what purpose are all his labours in the pursuit of an object, which it is not in his power to discover or ascertain?—Let us then seriously enquire, what account can be given of our present ignorance, respecting what is good for us in this life; whether nothing be left, but only to wander in uncertainty amidst this darkness, and to lament it as the sad consequence of our fallen state; or whether such instructions may not be derived from it, as give ground for acknowledging, that by this, as by all its other appointments, the wisdom of Providence brings real good out of seeming evil? I shall, in order to determine this point, first, endeavour to illustrate the doctrine of the Text, *That we know not, or at most know imperfectly, what is good for us in this life*: I shall next explain the causes to which this defect in our knowledge is owing: And then shall show the purposes which it was intended to serve, and the effects which it ought to produce on our conduct.

THE whole history of mankind seems a comment on the doctrine of the Text. When we review the course of human affairs, one of the first objects which every-where attracts our notice, is, the mistaken judgment of men concerning their own interest. The *sore evil* which Solomon long ago remarked with respect to riches, of their being *kept by the owners thereof to their hurt*, takes place equally with respect to dominion and power, and all the splendid objects and high stations of life. We every day behold men climbing, by painful steps, to that dangerous height, which, in the end, renders their fall more severe, and their ruin more conspicuous. But it is not to high stations that the doctrine of the Text is limited. In the crimes by which too often these are gained, and in the misfortunes which they afterwards bring forth, the greater part of every audience may think themselves little concerned. Leaving such themes, therefore, to the poet and the historian, let us come nearer to ourselves, and survey the ordinary walk of life.

Around us, we every-where behold a busy multitude. Restless and uneasy in their present situation, they are incessantly employed in accomplishing a change of it; and as soon as their wish is fulfilled, we discern, by their behaviour, that they are as dissatisfied as they were before. Where they expected to have found a paradise, they find a desert. The man of business pines for leisure. The leisure

for which he had ~~been~~ proves an irksome gloom; and, through want of employment, languishes, sickens, and dies. The man of retirement fancies no state to be so happy as that of active life. But he has not engaged long in the tumults and contests of the world, until he finds cause to look back with regret on the calm hours of his former privacy and retreat. Beauty, wit, eloquence, and fame, are eagerly desired by persons in every rank of life. They are the parent's fondest wish for his child; the ambition of the young, and the admiration of the old. And yet, in what numberless instances have they proved, to those who possessed them, no other than shining snares; seductions to vice, instigations to folly, and, in the end, sources of misery? Comfortably might their days have passed, had they been less conspicuous. But the distinctions which brought them forth to notice, conferred splendour, and withdrew happiness. Long life is, of all others, the most general, and seemingly the most innocent object of desire. With respect to this too, we so frequently err, that it would have been a blessing to many to have had their wish denied. There was a period when they might have quitted the stage with honour, and in peace. But, by living too long, they outlived their reputation; outlived their family, their friends, and comforts; and reaped nothing from the continuance of days, except to feel the pressure of age, to taste the dregs of life, and to behold a wider compass of human misery.

Man walketh in a vain show. His fears are often as vain as his wishes. As what flattered him in expectation, frequently wounds him in possession; so the event to which he looked forward with an anxious and fearful eye, has often, when it arrived, laid its terrors aside; nay, has brought in its train unexpected blessings. Both good and evil are beheld at a distance, through a perspective which deceives. The colours of objects when nigh, are entirely different from what they appeared when they were viewed in futurity.

THE fact then being undoubtedly certain, that it is common for men to be deceived in their prospects of happiness, let us next inquire into the causes of that deception. Let us attend to those peculiar circumstances in our state, which render us such incompetent judges of future good or evil in this life.

First, We are not sufficiently acquainted with ourselves to foresee our future feelings. We judge by the sensations of the present moment; and, in the fervour of desire, pronounce confidently concerning the desired object. But we reflect not, that our minds, like our bodies, undergo great alteration, from the situations into which they are thrown, and the progressive stages of life through which they pass. Hence, concerning any condition which is yet untried, we conjecture with much uncertainty. In imagination, we carry our present wants, inclinations, and sentiments, into the state of life to which we aspire. But no sooner have we entered on it, than our sentiments and inclinations change. New wants and desires arise; new objects are required to gratify them; and by consequence our old dissatisfaction returns, and the void, which was to have been filled, remains as great as it was before.

But next, supposing our knowledge of ourselves sufficient to direct us in the choice of happiness, yet still we are liable to err, from our ignorance of the connexions which subsist between our own condition and that of others. No individual can be happy, unless the circumstances of those around him be so adjusted as to conspire with his interest. For, in human society, no happiness or misery stands unconnected and independent. Our fortunes are interwoven by threads innumerable. We touch one another on all sides. One man's misfortune or success, his wisdom or his folly, often, by its consequences, reaches through multitudes. Such a system is far too complicated for our arrangement. It requires adjustments beyond our skill and power. It is a chaos of events, into which our eye cannot pierce; and is capable of regulation, only by Him who perceives at one glance the relation of each to all.

Farther, as we are ignorant of the events which will arise from the combination of our circumstances with those of others, so we are equally ignorant of the influence which the present transactions of our life may have upon those which are future. The important question is not, What is good for a man one day? but, What is *good for him all the days of his life*? — Not, What will yield him a few scattered pleasures? but, What will render his life happy on the whole amount? And is he able to answer that question, who knoweth not what *one day may bring forth*; who cannot tell, whether the events of it may not branch out into consequences, which will assume a direction quite opposite to that in which they set forth, and spread themselves over all his life to come? There is not any present moment that is unconnected with some future one. The life of every man is a continued chain of incidents, each link of which hangs upon the former. The transition from cause to effect, from event to event, is often carried on by secret steps, which our foresight cannot divine, and our sagacity is unable to trace. Evil may, at some future period, bring forth good; and good may bring forth evil, both equally unexpected. Had the Patriarch, Joseph, continued to loiter under his father's fond indulgence, he might have lived an obscure and insignificant life. From the pit and the prison, arose the incidents which made him the ruler of Egypt, and the saviour of his father's house.

Lastly, Supposing every other incapacity to be removed, our ignorance of the dangers to which our spiritual state is exposed, would disqualify us for judging soundly concerning our true happiness. Higher interests than those of the present world, are now depending. All that is done or suffered by us here, ultimately refers to that immortal world, for which good men are trained up, under the care of an Almighty parent. We are as incompetent judges of the measures necessary to be pursued for this end, as children are of the proper conduct to be held in their education. We foresee the dangers of our spiritual, still less than we do those of our natural state; because we are less attentive to trace them. We are still more exposed to vice than to misery; because the confidence which we place in our virtue, is yet worse founded than that which we place in our wisdom. Can you esteem him prosperous who is raised to

a situation which flatters his passions, but which corrupts his principles, disorders his temper, and, finally, oversets his virtue? In the ardour of pursuit, how little are these effects foreseen? And yet, how often are they accomplished by a change of condition? Latent corruptions are called forth; seeds of guilt are quickened into life; a growth of crimes arises, which, had it not been for the false culture of prosperity, would never have seen the light. How often is man, boastful as he is of reason, merely the creature of his fortune; formed and moulded by the incidents of his life? Hazael, when yet a private man, detested the thoughts of cruelty. *Thou shalt slay the young men with the sword, said the Prophet. Thou shalt dash the children, and rip up the women with child. Is thy servant a dog,* replied Hazael, *that he should do these things?** But no sooner was he clothed with the coveted purple, than it seemed to taint his nature. He committed the crimes of which, at a distance, he believed himself incapable; and became the bloody tyrant whose character his soul once abhorred.

SUCH then at present is man; thus incapable of pronouncing with certainty concerning his own good or evil. Of futurity, he discerns little; and even that little he sees through a cloud. Ignorant of the alteration which his sentiments and desires will undergo, from new situations in life; ignorant of the consequences which will follow from the combination of his circumstances with those of others around him; ignorant of the influence which the present may have on the future events of his life; ignorant of the effect which a change of condition may produce on his moral character, and his eternal interests; how can he know *what is good for him all the days of his vain life, which spendeth as a shadow?*

Instead of only lamenting this ignorance, let us, in the last place, consider how it ought to be improved; what duties it suggests, and what wise ends it was intended by Providence to promote.

I. LET this doctrine teach us to proceed with caution and circumspection, through a world where evil so frequently lurks under the form of good. To be humble and modest in opinion, to be vigilant and attentive in conduct, to distrust fair appearances, and to restrain rash desires, are instructions which the darkness of our present state should strongly inculcate. God hath appointed our situation to be so ambiguous, in order both to call forth the exertion of those intelligent powers which he hath given us, and to enforce our dependence on his gracious aid. *It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps.* Surrounded with so many bewildering paths, among which the wisest are ready to stray, how earnestly should we implore, and how thankfully should we receive, that divine illumination which is promised in Scripture to the pious and the humble! *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him. He will guide them with his counsel. He will teach them the way that they should choose.* But what must be the fate of him, who, amidst all the dangers attending human conduct, neither looks up to Heaven for direction, nor properly exerts that reason which God hath given him? If to the most diligent inquirer, it

proves so difficult a task to distinguish true good, from those fallacious appearances with which it is ever blended, how should he discover it who brings neither patience nor attention to the search; who applies to no other counsellor than present pleasure, and, with a rash and credulous mind, delivers himself up to every suggestion of desire?

This admonition I particularly direct to those, who are in a period of life too often characterised by forward presumption and headlong pursuit. The self-conceit of the young, is the great source of those dangers to which they are exposed, and it is peculiarly unfortunate, that the age which stands most in need of the counsel of the wise, should be the most prone to condemn it. Confident in the opinions which they adopt, and in the measures which they pursue, they seem as if they understood Solomon to say, not, *Who knoweth*, but, *Who is ignorant of what is good for man all the days of his life?* The bliss to be aimed at, is, in their opinion, fully apparent. It is not the danger of mistake, but the failure of success, which they dread. Activity to seize, not sagacity to discern, is the only requisite which they value. — How long shall it be, ere the fate of your predecessors in the same course teach you wisdom? How long shall the experience of all ages continue to lift its voice to you in vain? Beholding the ocean on which you are embarked covered with wrecks, are not those fatal signals sufficient to admonish you of the hidden rock? If, in Paradise itself, there was a tree which bare fruit fair to the eye, but mortal in its effects, how much more, in this fallen state, may such deceiving appearances be expected to abound! The whole state of Nature is now become a scene of delusion to the sensual mind. Hardly any thing is what it appears to be. And what flatters most, is always farthest from reality. There are voices which sing around you; but whose strains allure to ruin. There is a banquet spread, where poison is in every dish. There is a couch which invites you to repose; but to slumber upon it, is death. In such a situation, *be not high-minded, but fear*. Let sobriety temper your unwary ardour. Let modesty check your rash presumption. Let wisdom be the offspring of reflection now, rather than the fruit of bitter experience hereafter.

II. LET OUR ignorance of what is good or evil, correct anxiety about worldly success. As rashness is the vice of youth, the opposite extreme of immoderate care is the vice of advancing years. The doctrine which I have illustrated, is equally adapted for checking both. Since we are so often betrayed into evil by the mistaken pursuit of good, care and attention are requisite, both in forming our choice, and in conducting our pursuit; but since our attention and care are liable to be so often frustrated, they should never be allowed to deprive us of tranquillity.

The ignorance in which we are left concerning good and evil, is not such as to supersede prudence in conduct: For wisdom is still found to *excel folly as far as light excelleth darkness*. But it is that degree of uncertainty, which ought to render us temperate in pursuit; which ought to calm the perturbation of hope and fear, and to cure the pain of anxiety. Anxiety is the poison of human life. It is the parent of many sins, and of more miseries. In a world where

every thing is so doubtful, where you may succeed in your wish, and be miserable; where you may be disappointed, and be blest in the disappointment; what means this restless stir and commotion of mind? Can your solicitude alter the course, or unravel the intricacy of human events? Can your curiosity pierce through the cloud which the Supreme Being hath made impenetrable to mortal eye? — To provide against every apparent danger, by the employment of the most promising means, is the office of wisdom. But at this point wisdom stops. It commands you to retire, after you have done all that is incumbent on you, and to possess your mind in peace. By going beyond this point; by giving yourselves up to immoderate concern about unknown events, you can do nothing to advance your success, and you do much to ruin your peace. You plant within your breast the thorn which is long to gall you. To the vanity of life, you add a vexation of spirit, which is wholly of your own creation, not of Divine appointment. For the dubious goods of this world were never designed by God to raise such eager attachment. They were given to man for his occasional refreshment, not for his chief felicity. By setting an excessive value upon objects which were intended only for your secondary regard, you change their nature. Seeking more satisfaction from them than they are able to afford, you receive less than they might give. From a mistaken care to secure your happiness, you bring upon yourselves certain misery.

III. LET your ignorance of good and evil determine us to follow Providence, and to resign ourselves to God. One of the most important lessons which can be given to man, is resignation to his Maker; and nothing inculcates it more than the experience of his own inability to guide himself. — You know not what is good for you, in the future periods of life. But God perfectly knows it; and if you faithfully serve him, you have reason to believe that he will always consult it. Before him lies the whole succession of events which are to fill up your existence. It is in his power to arrange and model them at his pleasure, and so to adapt one thing to another, as to fulfil his promise of making them *all work together for good to those who love him*. Here then, amidst the agitations of desire, and the perplexities of doubt, is one fixed point of rest. By this let us abide; and dismiss our anxiety about things uncertain and unknown. *Acquaint yourselves with God, and be at peace*. Secure the *one thing needful*. Study to acquire an interest in the Divine favour; and you may safely surrender yourselves to the Divine administration.

When tempted to repine at your condition, reflect how uncertain it is, whether you should have been happier in any other. Remembering the vanity of many of your former wishes, and the fallacy which you have so often experienced in your schemes of happiness, be thankful that you are placed under a wiser direction than your own. Be not too particular in your petitions to Heaven, concerning your temporal interest. Suffer God to govern the world according to his own plan; and only pray, that he would bestow what his unerring wisdom sees to be best for you on the whole. In a word, *Commit your way unto the Lord. Trust in him, and do good. Follow*

wherever his providence leads; comply with whatever his will requires; and leave all the rest to him.

IV. LET our ignorance of what is good for us in this life, prevent our taking any unlawful step, in order to compass our most favourite designs. Were the sinner bribed with any certain and unquestionable advantage; could the means which he employs ensure his success and could that success ensure his comfort; he might have some body to offer for deviating from the path of virtue. But the doctrine which I have illustrated, deprives him of all excuse, and places his folly in the most striking light. He climbs the steep rock, and treads on the edge of a precipice, in order to catch a shadow. He has cause to dread, not only the uncertainty of the event which he wishes to accomplish, but the nature also of that event when accomplished. He is not only liable to that disappointment of success, which so often frustrates all the designs of men; but liable to a disappointment still more cruel, that of being successful and miserable at once. Riches and pleasures are the chief temptations to criminal deeds. Yet those riches, when obtained, may very possibly overwhelm him with unforeseen miseries. Those pleasures may cut short his health and life. And is it for such doubtful and fallacious rewards, that the deceiver fills his mouth with lies, the friend betrays his benefactor, the apostate renounces his faith, and the assassin covers himself with blood?

Whoever commits a crime, incurs a certain evil for a most uncertain good. What will turn to his advantage in the course of this life, he cannot with any assurance know. But this he may know, with full certainty, that by breaking the Divine commandments, he will draw upon his head that displeasure of the Almighty, which shall crush him for ever. The advantages of this world, even when innocently gained, are uncertain blessings; when obtained by criminal means, they carry a curse in their bosom. To the virtuous, they are often no more than chaff. To the guilty, they are always poison.

V. LET our imperfect knowledge of what is good or evil, attach us the more to those few things concerning which there can be no doubt of their being truly good. Of temporal things which belong to this class, the catalogue, it must be confessed, is small. Perhaps the chief worldly good we should wish to enjoy, is a sound mind in a sound body. Health and peace, a moderate fortune, and a few friends, sum up all the undoubted articles of temporal felicity. Wise was the man who addressed this prayer to God; *Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me. Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.** He whose wishes, respecting the possessions of this world, are the most reasonable and bounded, is likely to lead the safest, and, for that reason, the most desirable life. By aspiring too high, we frequently miss the happiness which, by a less ambitious aim, we might have gained. High happiness on earth, is rather a picture which the imagination forms, than a reality which man is allowed to possess.

* PROV. XXX. 8, 9.

But with regard to spiritual felicity, we are not confined to such humble views. Clear and determinate objects are proposed to our pursuit; and full scope is given to the most ardent desire. The forgiveness of our sins, and the assistance of God's holy grace to guide our life; the improvement of our minds in knowledge and wisdom, in piety and virtue; the protection and favour of the great Father of all, of the blessed Redeemer of mankind, and of the Spirit of sanctification and comfort; these are objects, in the pursuit of which, is no room for hesitation and distrust, nor any ground for temptation in my Text, *Who knoweth what is good for man?* Had Providence spread an equal obscurity over happiness of every kind, we might have had some reason to complain of the vanity of our condition. But we are not left to so hard a fate. The Son of God hath descended from Heaven to be the *Light of the world*. He hath removed that veil which covered true bliss from the search of wandering mortals, and hath taught them the way which leads to life. Worldly enjoyments are shown to be hollow and deceitful, with an express intention to direct their affections towards those which are spiritual. The same discoveries which diminish the value of the one, serve to increase that of the other. Finally,

VI. LET our ignorance of what is good or evil here below, lead our thoughts and desires to a better world. I have endeavoured to vindicate the wisdom of Providence, by showing the many useful purposes which this ignorance at present promotes. It serves to check presumption and rashness, and to enforce a diligent exertion of our rational powers, joined with a humble dependance on Divine aid. It moderates eager passions respecting worldly success. It inculcates resignation to the disposal of a Providence which is much wiser than man. It restrains us from employing unlawful means in order to compass our most favourite designs. It tends to attach us more closely to those things which are unquestionably good. It is, therefore, such a degree of ignorance as suits the present circumstances of man, better than more complete information concerning good and evil.

At the same time, the causes which render this obscurity necessary, too plainly indicate a broken and corrupted state of human nature. They show this life to be a state of trial. They suggest the ideas of a land of pilgrimage, not of the house of rest. Low-minded and base is he, who aspires to no higher portion; who could be satisfied to spend his whole existence, in chasing those treacherous appearances of good, which so often mock his pursuit. What shadow can be more vain, than the life of the greatest part of mankind? Of all that eager and bustling crowd which we behold on the earth, how few discover the path of true happiness? How few can we find whose activity has not been misemployed, and whose course terminates not in confessions of disappointments? Is this the state, are these the habitations, to which a rational spirit, with all its high hopes and great capacities, is to be limited for ever? — Let us bless that God who hath set nobler prospects before us; who, by the death and resurrection of his Son Jesus Christ, hath begotten us to the lively hope of an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in the heavens.

Let us show ourselves worthy of such a hope, by *setting our affections upon the things above, not upon things on the earth.* Let us walk by faith, and not by sight; and, amidst the obscurity of this faint and dubious twilight, console ourselves with the expectation of a brighter day which is soon to open. This earth is the land of shadows. But we are to pass into the world of realities; where the proper objects of human desire shall be displayed; where the substance of that bliss shall be found, whose image only we now pursue; where no fallacious hopes shall any longer allure, no smiling appearances shall betray, no insidious joy shall sting; but where truth shall be inseparably united with pleasure, and the mists which hang over this preliminary state being dissipated, the perfect knowledge of good shall lead to the full enjoyment of it for ever.

SERMON IX.

ON RELIGIOUS RETIREMENT.

PSALM IV. 4.

Commune with your own heart, upon your bed, and be still.

MUCH communing with themselves there has always been among mankind; though frequently, God knows, to no purpose, or to a purpose worse than none. Could we discover the employment of men in retirement, how often should we find then thoughts occupied with subjects which they would be ashamed to own? What a large share have ambition and avarice, at some times the grossest passions, and at other times the meanest trifles, in their solitary musings? They carry the world, with all its vices, into their retreat; and may be said to dwell in the midst of the world, even when they seem to be alone.

This, surely, is not that sort of communion which the Psalmist recommends. For this is not properly *communing with our heart*, but rather holding secret intercourse with the world. What the Psalmist meant to recommend, is religious recollection, that exercise of thought which is connected with the present circumstances and preceding words, to *stand alone, and in silence, to commune with ourselves*, under the charge of our immortal being, and to *follow those paths of wisdom* which are leading us to eternal life. In the first place, show the advantages of such serious retirement and meditation; and, in the second place, point out some of the principal subjects which ought to employ us in our retirement.

The advantages of retiring from the world, to *commune with our heart*, will be found to be great, whether we regard our happiness in this world, or our preparation for the world to come.

Let us consider them, first, with respect to our happiness in this world. It will readily occur to you, that an entire retreat from worldly affairs, is not what religion requires; nor does it even enjoin

a greater retreat from them. Some stations of life would not permit this; and there are few stations which render it necessary. The chief field, both of the duty and of the improvement of man, lies in active life. By the graces and virtues which he exercises amidst his fellow-creatures, he is trained up for heaven. A total retreat from the world is so far from being, as the Roman Catholic Church holds, the perfection of religion, that, some particular cases excepted, it is no other than the abuse of it.

But, should an entire retreat would lay us aside from the power which Providence chiefly intended us, it is certain that, without occasional retreat, we must act that part very ill. There will be neither consistency in the conduct, nor dignity in the character, of one who sets apart no share of his time for meditation and reflection. In the heat and bustle of life, while passion is every moment throwing false colours on the objects around us, nothing can be viewed in a just light. If you wish that reason should exert her proper power, you must step aside from the crowd, into the cool and quiet shade. It is there, that, with sober and steady eye, she searches what is good or ill, what is wise or foolish, in human conduct; she looks back on the past, she looks forward to the future; and forms plans, not for the present moment only, but for the whole of life. How should that man discharge any part of his duty aright, who never suffers his passions to cool? And how should his passions cool, who is engaged, without interruption, in the tumult of the world? This incessant stir may be called the perpetual drunkenness of life. It raises that eager fermentation of spirit, which will be ever sending forth the dangerous fumes of rashness and folly. Whereas he who mingles religious retreat with worldly affairs, remains calm, and master of himself. He is not whirled round, and rendered giddy, by the agitations of the world; but, from that sacred retirement, in which he has been conversant among higher objects, comes forth into the world with manly tranquillity, fortified by the principles which he has formed, and prepared for whatever may befall.

As he who is unacquainted with retreat, cannot sustain any character with propriety, so neither can he enjoy the world with any advantage. Of the two classes of men who are most apt to be negligent of this duty, the one of pleasure and the one of business, it is hard to say which is most in point of enjoyment from this neglect. To the former, the moment of time is to be lost, which is taken out of the course of improvement. The latter are more gayly with another, and more intent on study; till, when the time of musing remains but to tread the same beaten road, to enjoy what they have already enjoyed, and to see what they have often seen before, thus drawn to the object, become vapid and tasteless. What might have pleased long, if enjoyed with temperance and mingled with retirement, being devoured with such eager haste, speedily forfeits its delights. Hence, these are the persons, who, passing through a rapid course of pleasure, and having glittered for a few years in the foremost line of public engagements, are the most apt to retreat at last to a melancholy retreat; not led by religion or reason, but driven by dis-

appointed hopes, and exhausted spirits, to the pensive conclusion that *all is vanity*.

If uninterrupted intercourse with the world wear out the man of pleasure, it no less oppresses the man of business and ambition. The strongest spirits must at length sink under it. The happiest temper must be soured by incessant returns of the opposition, the inconstancy, and treachery of men. For he who lives always in the bustle of the world, lives in a perpetual warfare. Here an enemy encounters; there a rival supplants him. The ingratitude of a friend stings him this hour, and the pride of a superiour wounds him the next. In vain he flies for relief to trifling amusements. These may afford a temporary opiate to care; but they communicate no strength to the mind. On the contrary, they leave it more soft and defenceless, when molestations and injuries renew their attack.

Let him who wishes for an effectual cure to all the wounds which the world can inflict, retire from intercourse with men to intercourse with God. When he enters into his closet, and shuts the door, let him shut out, at the same time, all intrusion of worldly care; and dwell among objects divine and immortal. — Those fair prospects of order and peace shall there open to his view, which form the most perfect contrast to the confusion and misery of this earth. The celestial inhabitants quarrel not; among them there is neither ingratitude, nor envy, nor tumult. Men may harass one another; but in the kingdom of God, concord and tranquillity reign for ever. — From such objects there beams upon the mind of the pious man, a pure and enlivening light; there is diffused over his heart a holy calm. His agitated spirit re-assumes its firmness, and regains its peace. The world sinks in its importance; and the load of mortality and misery loses almost all its weight. The *green pastures* open, and the *still waters* flow around him, beside which the *Shepherd of Israel* guides his flock. The disturbances and alarms, so formidable to those who are engaged in the tumults of the world, seem to him only like thunder rolling afar off; like the noise of distant waters, whose sound he hears, whose course he traces, but whose waves touch him not. — As religious retirement is thus evidently conducive to our happiness in this life, so,

In the second place, it is absolutely necessary, in order to prepare us for the life to come. He who lives always in public, cannot live to his own soul. The world *lieth in wickedness*; and with good reason the Christian is exhorted, *not to be conformed to it, but transformed by the renewing of his mind*. Our conversation and intercourse with the world is, in several respects, an education for vice. From our earliest youth, we are accustomed to hear riches and honours extolled as the chief possessions of man; and proposed to us, as the principal aim of our future pursuits. We are trained up, to look with admiration on the flattering marks of distinction which they bestow. In quest of those fancied blessings, we see the multitude around us eager and fervent. Principles of duty, we may, perhaps, hear sometimes inculcated; but we seldom behold them brought into competition with worldly profit. The soft names and plausible colours, under

which deceit, sensuality, and revenge, are presented to us in common discourse, weaken, by degrees, our natural sense of the distinction between good and evil. We often meet with crimes authorised by high examples, and rewarded with the caresses and smiles of the world. We discover, perhaps, at last, that those whom we are taught to reverence, and to regard as our patterns of conduct, act upon principles no purer than those of others. Thus breathing habitually a contagious air, how certain is our ruin, unless we sometimes retreat from this pestilential region, and seek for proper correctives of the disorders which are contracted there? Religious retirement both abates the disease, and furnishes the remedy. It lessens the corrupting influence of the world; and it gives opportunity for better principles to exert their power. He who is accustomed to turn aside, and commune with himself, will, sometimes at least, hear the truths which the multitude do not tell him. A more sound instructor will lift his voice, and awaken within the heart those latent suggestions, which the world had overpowered and suppressed.

The acts of prayer and devotion, the exercises of faith and repentance, all the great and peculiar duties of the religion of Christ, necessarily suppose retirement from the world. This was one chief end of their institution, that they might be the means of occasionally sequestering us from that great scene of vice and folly, the continued presence of which is so hurtful. Solitude is the hallowed ground which Religion hath, in every age, chosen for her own. There, her inspiration is felt, and her secret mysteries elevate the soul. There, falls the tear of contrition; there, rises towards Heaven, the sigh of the heart; there, melts the soul with all the tenderness of devotion, and pours itself forth before him who made, and him who redeemed it. How can any one who is unacquainted with such employments of mind, be fit for Heaven? If Heaven be the habitation of pure affections, and of intellectual joy, can such a state be relished by him who is always immersed among sensible objects, and has never acquired any taste for the pleasures of the understanding, and the heart?

The great and the worthy, the pious and the virtuous, have ever been addicted to serious retirement. It is the characteristic of little and frivolous minds, to be wholly occupied with the vulgar objects of life. These fill up their desires, and supply all the entertainment which their coarse apprehensions can relish. But a more refined and enlarged mind leaves the world behind it, feels a call for higher pleasures, and seeks them in retreat. The man of public spirit has recourse to it, in order to form plans for general good; the man of genius, in order to dwell on his favourite themes; the philosopher, to pursue his discoveries; the saint, to improve himself in grace. *Isaac went out to meditate in the fields, at the evening tide.* David, amidst all the splendour of royalty, often bears witness both to the pleasure which he received, and to the benefit which he reaped from devout meditation. *I communed with my own heart, and my spirit made diligent search. I thought on my ways, and turned my feet unto God's testimonies. In the multitude of thoughts within me, his comforts delight my soul.* Our blessed Saviour himself, though, of all who ever

lived on earth, he needed least the assistance of religious retreat, yet, by his frequent practice, has done it signal honour. Often were the garden, the mountain, and the silence of the night, sought by him, for intercourse with Heaven. *When he had sent the multitude away, he went up into a mountain, apart, to pray.*

The advantages of religious retirement will still more clearly appear, by considering, as was proposed, in the next place, some of those great objects which should there employ our thoughts. I shall mention only three, which are of the most plain and acknowledged importance; God, the world, and our own character. •

I. WHEN you retire from the world, *commune with your hearts* concerning God. Impressions of Deity, besides their being the principle of what is strictly termed religion, are the great support of all moral sentiment, and virtuous conduct, among men. But with what difficulty are they preserved in any due degree of force, amidst the affairs and avocations of the world? While the crowd of surrounding objects is ever rushing on the imagination, and occupying the senses and the heart, what is not only absent from view, but, by its nature, invisible, is apt to vanish like a shadow. Hence, it is given as the character of wicked men in Scripture, that they are *without God in the world*. They deny not, perhaps, that he does exist; but it is the same to them as though he did not: For, having lost him from their view, his existence has no effect on their conduct. If, at any time, the idea of God rise in their mind, it rises like a terrifying phantom, which they hasten to expel, and which they gladly fancy to be unreal, because they see it make so little impression on others around them.

Let him who retires to serious meditation, begin with impressing deeply on his mind this important truth, that there is undoubtedly a Supreme Governour, who presides over the universe. But let him not imagine, that to commune with his heart concerning God, is to search into the mysteries of the Divine nature, or to attempt a discovery of the whole plan of Providence. Long enough he may bewilder himself in this maze, without making any proficiency in the practical knowledge of God. Shall he who knows so little of his own nature, or of the nature of the object with which he is surrounded, expect to comprehend the Being who made him? To commune with ourselves, to any useful purpose, on this subject, is to bring home to our souls the internal authoritative sense of God, as of a Sovereign and a Father. It is not to speculate about what is mysterious in his essence, but to contemplate what is displayed of his perfections. It is to realize the presence of the Supreme Being, so as to produce the most profound veneration; and to awaken the earnest desire of as near an approach as our nature will permit, to that great Fountain of happiness and life.

After this manner was that holy man affected, who uttered this ardent wish, *O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!* * — If, with such a frame of mind, you seek after God, be assured that he is not far from you; and that, though you are not

* Job, xxiii. 3.

permitted as yet to *come to his seat*, you may, at least, reach the footstool of his throne, and touch the robe that covers him. In the midst of your solitary musings, lift up your eyes, and behold all nature full of God. Look up to the firmament, and admire his glory. Look round on the earth, and observe his presence every-where displayed. If the gay landscape, or the fruitful field, present themselves to your eye, behold him smiling upon his works. If the mountain raise its lofty head, or the expanse of waters roll its tide before you, contemplate, in those great and solemn objects, his power and majesty. Nature, in all its diversities, is a varied manifestation of the Deity. If you were to *take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea*, even there you would find him. For *in him you live and move*. He fills and animates all space. In the barren wilderness, as in the peopled region, you can trace his footsteps; and in the deepest solitude, you may hear a voice which testifies of him.

Him, indeed, you are never to confound with the workmanship of his hands. Nature, in its most awful or most pleasing scenes, exhibits no more than different forms of inanimate matter. But on these dead forms is impressed the glory of a living spirit. The beauty, or the greatness, which appears in them, flows from the Fountain of all greatness and beauty; in him it centers; of his perfection it reflects an image; and towards him should lead your view.—In conversing with a fellow-creature on earth, it is not with his body we converse, though it is his body only which we see. From his words and actions we conceive his mind; with his mind, though invisible, we hold correspondence, and direct towards this Spiritual Essence our affection and regard. In like manner, though here we behold no more of God than what his works display, yet, in those displays, we are capable of perceiving the universal Spirit, and of holding correspondence with this unseen Being, in veneration, gratitude, and love.

It is thus that a pious man, in his retired meditations, viewing natural objects with a spiritual eye, communes with his heart concerning God. He walks among the various scenes of nature, as within the precincts of a great temple, in the habitual exercise of devotion. To those discoveries of the Supreme Being in his works, let him apply the comment of his word. From the world of Nature, let him follow God into the world of Grace. When conducted from the outer courts into this inmost sanctuary of the temple, he shall feel himself brought still more nigh to the Sacred Presence. In the great plan of Divine Wisdom, for extirpating the evils produced by sin, he shall receive the interpretation of many of the hidden mysteries of Nature. He shall discover in Christ, the Deity made, in some degree, visible to sense. In the beneficent works which he performed, and the gracious undertaking which he accomplished, he shall behold *the brightness of the Father's glory*, and shall discern it to be *full of grace and truth*.—From the sacred retreat wherein his thoughts have been thus employed, he returns to the world like a superiour being. He carries into active life those pure and elevating sentiments to which the giddy crowd are strangers. A certain odour of sanctity remains upon

his mind, which, for a while at least, will repel the contagion of the world.

II. COMMUNE with your heart, in the season of retirement, concerning the world. The world is the great deceiver, whose fallacious arts it highly imports us to detect. But, in the midst of its pleasures and pursuits, the detection is impossible. We tread, as within an enchanted circle, where nothing appears as it truly is. It is only in retreat that the charm can be broken. Did men employ that retreat, not in carrying on the delusion which the world has begun, not in forming plans of imaginary bliss, but in subjecting the happiness which the world affords to a strict discussion, the spell would dissolve; and in the room of the unreal prospects which had long amused them, the nakedness of the world would appear.

Prepare yourselves, then, to encounter the light of truth. Resolve rather to bear the disappointment of some flattering hopes, than to wander for ever in the paradise of fools. While others meditate in secret on the means of attaining worldly success, let it be your employment to scrutinize that success itself. Calculate fairly to what it amounts; and whether you are not losers, on the whole, by your apparent gain. Look back for this purpose on your past life. Trace it from your earliest youth; and put the question to yourselves, What have been its happiest periods? Were they those of quiet and innocence, or those of ambition and intrigue? Has your real enjoyment uniformly kept pace with what the world calls prosperity? As you are advanced in wealth or station, did you proportionably advance in happiness? Has success, almost in any one instance, fulfilled your expectation? Where you reckoned upon most enjoyment, have you not often found least? Wherever guilt entered into your pleasures, did not its sting long remain, after the gratification was past?—Such questions as these, candidly answered, would, in a great measure, unmask the world. They would expose the vanity of its pretensions; and convince you, that there are other springs than those which the world affords, to which you must apply for happiness.

While you commune with your heart concerning what the world now is, consider also what it will one day appear to be. Anticipate the awful moment of your bidding it an eternal farewell. Think, what reflections shall most probably arise when you are quitting the field, and looking back on the scene of action. In what light will your closing eyes contemplate those vanities which now shine so bright, and those interests which now swell into such high importance? What part will you then wish to have acted? What shall then appear momentous, what trifling, in human conduct?—Let the sober sentiments which such anticipations suggest, temper now your misplaced ardour. Let the last conclusions which you shall form, enter into the present estimate which you make of the world, and of life.

Moreover, in communing with yourselves concerning the world, contemplate it as subject to the Divine dominion. The greater part of men behold nothing more than the rotation of human affairs. They see a great crowd ever in motion; the fortunes of men alternately rising and falling; virtue often distressed, and prosperity appearing

to be the purchase of worldly wisdom. But this is only the outside of things. Behind the curtain there is a far greater scene, which is beheld by none but the retired religious spectator. Lift up that curtain, when you are alone with God. View the world with the eye of a Christian; and you shall see, that while *man's heart deviseth his way, it is the Lord who directeth his steps.* You shall see, that however men appear to move and act after their own pleasure, they are, nevertheless, retained in secret bonds by the Almighty, and all their operations rendered subservient to the ends of his moral government. You shall behold him obliging *the wrath of man to praise him*; punishing the sinner by means of his own iniquities; from the trials of the righteous, bringing forth their reward; and to a state of seeming universal confusion, preparing the wisest and most equitable issue. While the *fashion of this world* is passing fast away, you shall discern the glory of another rising to succeed it. You shall behold all human events, our griefs and our joys, our love and our hatred, our character and our memory, absorbed in the ocean of eternity; and no trace of our present existence left, except its being for ever *well with the righteous, and ill with the wicked.* — Such a view of the world, frequently presented to our minds, could not fail to enforce those solemn conclusions; *There is no wisdom nor counsel against the Lord. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole of man. What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?*

III. COMMUNE with your heart concerning yourselves, and your real character. To acquire a thorough knowledge of ourselves, is an attainment no less difficult than important. For men are generally unwilling to see their own imperfections; and when they are willing to inquire into them, their self-love imposes on their judgment. Their intercourse with one another assists the delusion to which, of themselves, they are prone. For the ordinary commerce of the world is a commerce of flattery and falsehood; where reciprocally they deceive and are deceived, where every one appears under an assumed form, professes esteem which he does not feel, and bestows praise in order to receive it. It is only in retreat where those false semblances disappear, and those flattering voices are silent, that a man can learn to *think soberly of himself, and as he ought to think.*

It has been said, that there are three characters which every man sustains; and these often extremely different from one another: One, which he possesses in his own opinion; another, which he carries in the estimation of the world; and a third, which he bears in the judgment of God. It is only the last which ascertains what he really is. — Whether the character which the world forms of you be above or below the truth, it imports you not much to know. But it is of eternal consequence, that the character which you possess in your own eyes, be formed upon that which you bear in the sight of God. In order to try it by this great standard, you must lay aside, as much as possible, all partiality to yourselves; and, in the season of retirement, explore your heart with such accurate scrutiny, as may bring your hidden defects to light.

Inquire, for this purpose, whether you be not conscious, that the fair opinion which the world entertains of you, is founded on their partial knowledge both of your abilities and your virtues? Would you be willing that all your actions should be publicly canvassed? Could you bear to have your thoughts laid open? Are there no parts of your life which you would be uneasy if an enemy could discover? In what light, then, must these appear to God? When you have kept free of vice, has your innocence proceeded from purity of principle, or from worldly motives? Rise there no envy or malignity within you when you compare your own condition with that of others? Have you been as solicitous to regulate your heart, as to preserve your manners from reproach? Professing yourselves to be Christians, has the Spirit of Christ appeared in your conduct? Declaring that you hope for immortality, has that hope surmounted undue attachments to the present life?

Such investigation as this, seriously pursued, might produce to every man many discoveries of himself; discoveries not pleasing perhaps to vanity, but salutary and useful. For he can be only a flatterer, but no true friend to himself, who aims not at knowing his own defects as well as virtues. By imposing on the world, he may carry on some plan of fancied profit; but by imposing on his heart, what can he propose to gain? *He feedeth on ashes: A deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?**

Thus I have set before you some of those great objects which ought to employ your meditation in religious retirement. I have endeavoured to introduce you into a proper intercourse with your heart, concerning God, the world, and your own character. Let this intercourse terminate in fixing the principles of your future conduct. Let it serve to introduce consistency into your life. Nothing can be more wavering and disjointed, than the behaviour of those who are wholly men of the world, and have never been inured to commune with themselves. Dissipation is a more frequent cause of their ruin, than determined impiety. It is not so much because they have adopted bad principles, as because they have never attended to principles of any kind, that their lives are so full of incoherence and disorder. — You hover on the borders of sin and duty. One day, you read the Scriptures, you hear religious discourses, and form good resolutions. Next day, you plunge into the world, and forget the serious impression, as if it had never been made. The impression is again renewed, and again effaced; and in this circle your life revolves. Is such conduct worthy of creatures endowed with intelligent powers? Shall the close of life overtake you, before you have determined how to live? Shall the day never come, that is to find you steady in your views, decided in your plans; and engaged in a course of action which your mind approves? — If you wish that day ever to arrive, retirement and meditation must first bring you home to yourselves, from the dissipation in which you are now scattered; must teach you to fix such aims, and to lay down such rules of conduct, as are suitable

* Isaiah, xliv. 20.

to rational and immortal beings. Then will your character become uniform and respectable. Then you may hope that your life will proceed in such a train as shall prepare you, when it is finished, for joining the society of more exalted spirits.

SERMON X.

ON DEVOTION.

ACTS, x. 2.

Cornelius — A devout man —

THAT religion is essential to the welfare of man, can be proved by the most convincing arguments. But these, how demonstrative soever, are insufficient to support its authority over human conduct. For arguments may convince the understanding, when they cannot conquer the passions. Irresistible they seem in the calm hours of retreat; but in the season of action, they often vanish into smoke. There are other and more powerful springs, which influence the great movements of the human frame. In order to operate with success on the active powers, the heart must be gained. Sentiment and affection must be brought to the aid of reason. It is not enough that men believe religion to be a wise and rational rule of conduct, unless they relish it as agreeable, and find it to carry its own reward. Happy is the man, who, in the conflict of desire between God and the world, can oppose, not only argument to argument, but pleasure to pleasure; who, to the external allurements of sense, can oppose the internal joys of devotion; and to the uncertain promises of a flattering world, the certain experience of that *peace of God which passeth understanding, keeping his mind and heart.* — Such is the temper and spirit of a *devout man*. Such was the character of Cornelius, that good Centurion, whose *prayers and alms* are said to have *come up in memorial before God*. Of this character I intend, through Divine assistance, to discourse; and shall endeavour, I. To explain the nature of devotion; II. To justify, and recommend it; and, III. To rectify some mistakes concerning it.

I. DEVOTION is the lively exercise of those affections which we owe to the Supreme Being. It comprehends several emotions of the heart, which all terminate on the same great object. The chief of them are, veneration, gratitude, desire, and resignation.

It implies, first, profound veneration of God. By veneration, I understand an affection compounded of awe and love, the affection which, of all others, it best becomes creatures to bear towards their infinitely perfect Creator. Awe is the first sentiment that rises in the soul at the view of his greatness. But, in the heart of a devout man, it is a solemn and elevating, not a dejecting emotion; for he glows, rather than trembles, in the Divine presence. It is not the superstitious dread of unknown power, but the homage yielded by

the heart to him who is, at once, the greatest and the best of Beings. Omnipotence, viewed alone, would be a formidable object. But, considered in conjunction with the moral perfections of the Divine nature, it serves to heighten devotion. Goodness affects the heart with double energy, when residing in one so exalted. The goodness which we adore in him, is not like that which is common among men, a weak, mutable, undiscerning fondness, ill qualified to be the ground of assured trust. It is the goodness of a perfect Governour, acting upon a regular extensive plan; a steady principle of benevolence, conducted by wisdom; which, subject to no *variableness or shadow of turning*, free from all partiality and caprice, incapable of being either soothed by flattery or ruffled by resentment, resembles, in its calm and equal lustre, the eternal serenity of the highest heavens. *Thy mercy, O Lord! is in the heavens, and thy faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds. Thy righteousness is like the great mountains, and thy judgments are a great depth.*

Such are the conceptions of the great God, which fill with veneration the heart of a devout man. His veneration is not confined to acts of immediate worship. It is the habitual temper of his soul. Not only when engaged in prayer or praise, but in the silence of retirement, and even amidst the occupations of the world, the Divine Being dwells upon his thoughts. No place, and no object, appears to him void of God. On the works of Nature he views the impression of his hand; and in the actions of men, he traces the operation of his Providence. Whatever he beholds on earth, that is beautiful or fair, that is great, or good, he refers to God, as to the supreme origin of all the excellence which is scattered throughout his works. From those effects he rises to the first cause. From those streams he ascends to the fountain whence they flow. By those rays he is led to that eternal source of light in which they centre.

DEVOTION implies, secondly, sincere gratitude to God, for all his benefits. This is a warmer emotion than simple veneration. Veneration looks up to the Deity, as he is in himself: Gratitude regards what he is towards us. When a devout man surveys this vast universe, where beauty and goodness are every-where predominant; when he reflects on those numberless multitudes of creatures who, in their different stations, enjoy the blessings of existence; and when, at the same time, he looks up to an Universal Father, who hath thus filled creation with life and happiness, his heart glows within him. He adores that disinterested goodness which prompted the Almighty to raise up so many orders of intelligent beings, not that he might receive, but that he might give and impart; that he might pour forth himself, and communicate to the spirits which he formed, some emanations of his felicity.

The goodness of this Supreme Benefactor he gratefully contemplates, as displayed in his own state. He reviews the events of his life; and, in every comfort which has sweetened it, he discerns the Divine hand. Does he remember with affection, the parents under whose care he grew up, and the companions with whom he passed his youthful life? Is he now happy, in his family rising around him;

in the spouse who loves him, or in the children who give him comfort and joy? Into every tender remembrance of the past, and every pleasing enjoyment of the present, devotion enters; for in all those beloved objects, it recognizes God. The communication of love from heart to heart, is an effusion of his goodness. From his inspiration descends all the friendship which ever glowed on earth; and therefore, to him it justly returns in gratitude, and terminates on him.

But this life, with all its interests, is but a small part of human existence. A devout man looks forward to immortality, and discovers still higher subjects of gratitude. He views himself as a guilty creature, whom Divine benignity has received into grace; whose forfeited hopes it has restored; and to whom it has opened the most glorious prospects of future felicity. Such generosity shown to the fallen and miserable, is yet more affecting to the heart, than favours conferred on the innocent. He contemplates, with astonishment, the labours of the Son of God, in accomplishing redemption for men; and his soul overflows with thankfulness to him, *who loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood.* — *What shall I render to the Lord for all his benefits? Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me, bless his holy name; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, and healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction, and crowneth thee with loving kindness, and with tender mercies.*

Devotion implies, thirdly, the desire of the soul after the favour of the Supreme Being, as its chief good, and final rest. To inferior enjoyments, the devout man allots inferior and secondary attachment. He disclaims not every earthly affection. He pretends not to renounce all pleasure in the comforts of his present state. Such an unnatural renunciation humanity forbids, and religion cannot require. But from these he expects not his supreme bliss. He discerns the vanity which belongs to them all; and, beyond the circle of mutable objects which surround him, he aspires after some principles of more perfect felicity, which shall not be subject to change or decay. But where is this complete and permanent good to be found? Ambition pursues it in courts and palaces; and returns from the pursuit, loaded with sorrows. Pleasure seeks it among sensual joys; and retires with the confession of disappointment. *The deep saith, it is not in me; and the sea saith, it is not with me. It cannot be gotten for gold; neither shall silver be weighed for the price thereof. Its place is not in the land of the living.* True happiness dwells with God; and from the light of his countenance, it beams upon the devout man. His voice is, *Whom have I in Heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire beside thee.* After exploring heaven and earth for happiness, they seem to him a mighty void, a wilderness of shadows, where all would be empty and unsubstantial without God. But in his favour and love, he finds what supplies every defect of temporal objects; and assures tranquillity to his heart, amidst all the changes of his existence. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel; and thou shalt receive me to thy glory. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.*

From these sentiments and affections, Devotion advances, fourthly,

to an entire resignation of the soul to God. It is the consummation of trust and hope. It banishes anxious cares and murmuring thoughts. It reconciles us to every appointment of Divine Providence; and resolves every wish into the desire of pleasing him whom our hearts adore. Its genuine breathings are to this effect: "Conduct me, O God! in what path soever seemeth good to thee. In nothing shall I ever arraign thy sacred will. Dost thou require me to part with any worldly advantages, for the sake of virtue and a good conscience? I give them up. Dost thou command me to relinquish my friends, or my country? At thy call I cheerfully leave them. Dost thou summon me away from this world? Lo! I am ready to depart. Thou hast made, thou hast redeemed me, and I am thine. Myself, and all that belongs to me; I surrender to thy disposal. Let the men of the world have *their portion in this life*. Be it mine, to *behold thy face in righteousness; and when I awake, to be satisfied with thy likeness.*"

This, surely, is one of the noblest acts of which the human mind is capable, when thus, if we may be allowed the expression, it unites itself with God. Nor can any devotion be genuine, which inspires not sentiments of this nature. For devotion is not to be considered as a transient glow of affection, occasioned by some casual impressions of Divine goodness, which are suffered to remain unconnected with the conduct of life. It is a powerful principle, which penetrates the soul; which purifies the affections from debasing attachments; and, by a fixed and steady regard to God, subdues every sinful passion, and forms the inclinations to piety and virtue.

Such in general are the dispositions that constitute devotion. It is the union of veneration, gratitude, desire, and resignation. It expresses, not so much the performance of any particular duty, as the spirit which must animate all religious duties. It stands opposed, not merely to downright vice; but to a heart which is cold, and insensible to sacred things; which, from compulsion, perhaps, and a sense of interest, preserves some regard to the Divine commands, but obeys them without ardour, love, or joy. I proceed,

II. To recommend this devout spirit to your imitation. I begin with observing, That it is of the utmost consequence to guard against extremes of every kind in religion. We must beware, lest, by seeking to avoid one rock, we split upon another. It has been long the subject of remark, that superstition and enthusiasm are two capital sources of delusion; superstition, on the one hand, attaching men with immoderate zeal to the ritual and external part of religion; and enthusiasm, on the other, directing their whole attention to internal emotions, and mystical communications with the spiritual world; while neither the one nor the other has paid sufficient regard to the great moral duties of the Christian life. But, running with intemperate eagerness from these two great abuses of religion, men have neglected to observe, that there are extremes opposite to each of them, into which they are in hazard of precipitating themselves. Thus the horror of superstition has sometimes reached so far as to produce contempt for all external institutions; as if it were possible for religion to

subsist in the world, without forms of worship, or public acknowledgment of God. It has also happened that some, who, in the main, are well affected to the cause of goodness, observing that persons of a devout turn have at times been carried, by warm affections, into unjustifiable excesses, have thence hastily concluded that all devotion was a-kind to enthusiasm; and separating religion totally from the heart and affections, have reduced it to a frigid observance of what they call the rules of virtue. This is the extreme which I purpose at present to combat, by showing you, first, That true devotion is rational, and well founded; next, That it is of the highest importance to every other part of religion and virtue; and, lastly, That it is most conducive to our happiness.

IN the first place, True devotion is rational, and well founded. It takes its rise from affections, which are essential to the human frame. We are formed by Nature to admire what is great, and to love what is amiable. Even inanimate objects have power to excite those emotions. The magnificent prospects of the natural world fill the mind with reverential awe. Its beautiful scenes create delight. When we survey the actions and behaviour of our fellow-creatures, the affections glow with greater ardour; and, if to be unmoved, in the former case, argues a defect of sensibility in our powers, it discovers, in the latter, an odious hardness and depravity in the heart. The tenderness of an affectionate parent, the generosity of a forgiving enemy, the public spirit of a patriot or a hero, often fill the eyes with tears, and swell the breast with emotions too big for utterance. The object of those affections is frequently raised above us, in condition and rank. Let us suppose him raised also above us, in nature. Let us imagine, that an angel, or any being of superiour order, had condescended to be our friend, our guide, and patron; no person, sure, would hold the exaltation of his benefactor's character to be an argument why he should love and revere him less. — Strange! that the attachment and veneration, the warmth and overflowing of heart, which excellence and goodness on every other occasion command, should begin to be accounted irrational, as soon as the Supreme Being becomes their object. For what reason must human sensibility be extinct towards him alone? Are all benefits entitled to gratitude, except the highest and the best? Shall goodness cease to be amiable, only because it is perfect?

It will, perhaps, be said, that an unknown and invisible being is not qualified to raise affection in the human heart. Wrapt up in the mysterious obscurity of his nature, he escapes our search, and affords no determinate object to our love or desire. *We go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but we cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he worketh, but we cannot behold him: He hideth himself on the right hand, that we cannot see him.** — Notwithstanding this obscurity, is there any being in the universe more real and certain, than the Creator of the world, and the Supporter of all existence? Is he, in whom we live and move, too distant from us to excite devotion? His form and essence, indeed, we cannot see; but to be un-

* Job, xxiii. 8, 9.

seen, and imperfectly known, in many other instances, precludes neither gratitude nor love. It is not the sight, so much as the strong conception, or deep impression, of an object, which affects the passions. We glow with admiration of personages, who have lived in a distant age. Whole nations have been transported with zeal and affection, for the generous hero, or public deliverer, whom they knew only by fame. Nay, properly speaking, the direct object of our love is, in every case, invisible. For that on which affection is placed, is the mind, the soul, the internal character of our fellow-creatures; which, surely, is no less concealed, than the Divine Nature itself is, from the view of sense. From actions, we can only infer the dispositions of men; from what we see of their behaviour, we collect what is invisible; but the conjecture which we form is, at best, imperfect; and when their actions excite our love, much of their heart remains still unknown. I ask, then, in what respect God is less qualified than any other being to be an object of affection? Convinced that he exists; beholding his goodness spread abroad in his works, exerted in the government of the world, displayed in some measure to sense, in the actions of his son Jesus Christ! are we not furnished with every essential requisite which the heart demands, in order to indulge the most warm, and at the same time the most rational emotions?

If these considerations justify the reasonableness of devotion, as expressed in veneration, love, and gratitude, the same train of thought will equally justify it, when appearing in the forms of desire, delight, or resignation. The latter are, indeed, the consequence of the former. For we cannot but desire some communication with what we love; and will naturally resign ourselves to one, on whom we have placed the full confidence of affection. The aspirations of a devout man after the favour of God, are the effects of that earnest wish for happiness which glows in every breast. All men have somewhat that may be called the object of their devotion; reputation, pleasure, learning, riches, or whatever apparent good has strongly attached their heart. This becomes the centre of attraction, which draws them towards it; which quickens and regulates all their motions. While the men of the world are thus influenced by the objects which they severally worship, shall he only who directs all his devotion towards the Supreme Being be excluded from a place in the system of rational conduct? or be censured for having passions, whose sensibility corresponds to the great cause which moves them? — Having vindicated the reasonableness of devotion, I come,

In the second place, to show its importance, and the high place which it possesses in the system of religion, I address myself now to those, who, though they reject not devotion as irrational, yet consider it as an unnecessary refinement; an attainment which may be safely left to recluse and sequestered persons, who aim at uncommon sanctity. The solid and material duties of a good life, they hold to be in a great measure independent of devout affection; and think them sufficiently supported, by their necessary connexion with our interest, both in this and in a future world. They insist much upon religion being a calm, a sober, and rational principle of conduct. —

I admit that it is very laudable to have a rational religion. But I must admonish you, that it is both reproachful and criminal, to have an insensible heart. If we reduce religion into so cool a state, as not to admit love, affection, and desire, we shall leave it in 'possession of small influence over human life. Look abroad into the world, and observe how few act upon deliberate and rational views of their true interest. The bulk of mankind are impelled by their feelings. They are attracted by appearances of good. Taste and inclination rule their conduct. To direct their inclination and taste towards the highest objects; to form a relish within them, for virtuous and spiritual enjoyment; to introduce religion into the heart, is the province of devotion; and hence arises its importance to the interests of goodness.

Agreeably to this doctrine, the great Author of our religion, who well *knew what was in man*, laid the foundation of his whole system in the regeneration of the heart. The change which was to be accomplished on his followers, he did not purpose to effect, merely by regulating their external conduct; but by forming within them a new nature; by *taking away the heart of stone, and giving them a heart of flesh*; that is, a heart relenting and tender, yielding to the Divine impulse, and readily susceptible of devout impressions. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and mind, and soul, and strength: This is the first and great commandment. My son, give me thy heart*, is the call of God to each of us: And, indeed, if the heart be with-held, it is not easy to conceive what other offering we can present, that will be acceptable to him.

Of what nature must that man's religion be, who professes to worship God, and to believe in Christ; and yet raises his thoughts towards God, and his Saviour, without any warmth of gratitude or love? I speak not of those occasional decays of pious affection, to which the best are subject, but of a total insensibility to this part of religion. Surely, let the outward behaviour be ever so irreproachable, there must be some essential defect in a heart which remains always unmoved at the view of infinite goodness. The affections cannot, in this case, be deemed to flow in their natural channel. Some concealed malignity must have tainted the inward frame. This is not the man whom you would choose for your bosom-friend; or whose heart you could expect to answer, with reciprocal warmth, to yours. His virtue, if it deserve that name, is not of the most amiable sort; and may, with reason, receive the appellation (often injudiciously bestowed) of cold and dry morality. Such a person must, as yet, be *far from the kingdom of Heaven*.

As devotion is thus essential to religion in its principle, so it enters into the proper discharge of all its duties. It diffuses an auspicious influence over the whole of virtue. The prevailing temper of the mind is formed by its most frequent employments. Intercourse with Supreme perfection cannot, therefore, but ennoble and improve it. The pure love of God naturally connects itself with the love of man. Hence, devotion has been often found a powerful instrument in humanizing the manners of men, and taming their unruly passions. It smooths

what is rough, and softens what is fierce, in our nature. It is the great purifier of the affections. It inspires contempt of the low gratifications belonging to animal life. - It promotes a humble and cheerful contentment with our lot; and subdues that eager desire of riches and of power, which has filled this unhappy world with crimes and misery. Finally, it bestows that enlargement of heart in the service of God, which is the great principle, both of perseverance, and of progress in virtue. He who, unacquainted with devout affections, sets himself to keep the Divine commandments, will advance in obedience with a slow and languid pace; like one who, carrying a heavy burden, toils to mount the hill. But he whose heart devotion has warmed, will proceed on his way, cheerful and rejoicing. The one performs his duty, only because it is commanded; the other, because he loves it. The one is inclined to do no more than necessity requires; the other seeks to excel. The one looks for his reward in somewhat besides religion; the other finds it in religion itself: It is *his meat and drink to do the will of that heavenly Father*, whom he loves and adores. Which of these two is likely to make the greatest improvement in goodness, is easily discerned. Let us now consider,

In the third place, the influence of devotion on the happiness of life. Whatever promotes and strengthens virtue, whatever calms and regulates the temper, is a source of happiness. Devotion, as I have just now shown, produces those effects in a remarkable degree. It inspires composure of spirit, mildness, and benignity; weakens the painful, and cherishes the pleasing emotions; and, by these means, carries on the life of a pious man, in a smooth and placid tenour.

Besides exerting this habitual influence on the mind, devotion opens a field of enjoyments, to which the vicious are entire strangers; enjoyments the more valuable, as they peculiarly belong to retirement when the world leaves us, and to adversity when it becomes our foe. These are the two seasons, for which every wise man would most wish to provide some hidden store of comfort. For let him be placed in the most favourable situation which the human state admits, the world can neither always amuse him, nor always shield him from distress. There will be many hours of vacuity, and many of dejection, in his life. If he be a stranger to God, and to devotion, how dreary will the gloom of solitude often prove? With what oppressive weight will sickness, disappointment, or old age, fall upon his spirits? But, for those pensive periods, the pious man has a relief prepared. From the tiresome repetition of the common vanities of life, or from the painful corrosion of its cares and sorrows, devotion transports him into a new region; and surrounds him there with such objects as are the most fitted to cheer the dejection, to calm the tumults, and to heal the wounds of his heart. If the world has been empty and delusive, it gladdens him with the prospect of a higher and better order of things, about to arise. If men have been ungrateful and base, it displays before him the faithfulness of that Supreme Being, who, though every other friend fail, will never forsake him. Consult your experience, and you will find, that the two greatest sources of inward

joy are, the exercise of love directed towards a deserving object, and the exercise of hope terminating on some high and assured happiness. Both these are supplied by devotion; and therefore we have no reason to be surprised, if, on some occasions, it fill the hearts of good men with a satisfaction not to be expressed.

The refined pleasures of a pious mind are, in many respects, superior to the coarse gratifications of sense. They are pleasures which belong to the highest powers, and best affections of the soul; whereas the gratifications of sense reside in the lowest region of our nature. To the one, the soul stoops below its native dignity. The other, raise it above itself. The one, leave always a comfortless, often a mortifying remembrance behind them. The other, are reviewed with applause and delight. The pleasures of sense resemble a foaming torrent, which, after a disorderly course, speedily runs out, and leaves an empty and offensive channel. But the pleasures of devotion resemble the equable current of a pure river, which enlivens the fields through which it passes, and diffuses verdure and fertility along its banks. To thee, O Devotion! we owe the highest improvement of our nature, and much of the enjoyment of our life. Thou art the support of our virtue, and the rest of our souls, in this turbulent world. Thou composest the thoughts. Thou calmest the passions. Thou exaltest the heart. Thy communications, and thine only, are imparted to the low, no less than to the high; to the poor, as well as to the rich. In thy presence, worldly distinctions cease; and under thy influence, worldly sorrows are forgotten. Thou art the balm of the wounded mind. Thy sanctuary is ever open to the miserable; inaccessible only to the unrighteous and impure. Thou beginnest on earth, the temper of Heaven. In thee, the hosts of angels and blessed spirits eternally rejoice. It now remains,

III. To endeavour to correct some errors, into which men are apt to fall concerning devotion. For it is but too obvious, that errors are often committed in this part of religion. These frequently disfigure its appearance before the world, and subject it to unjust reproach. Let us therefore attend deliberately to its nature, so as to distinguish pure and rational devotion, of which I have hitherto treated, from that which is, in any degree, spurious and adulterated.

In the first place, It is an error to place devotion in the mere performance of any external act of worship. Prayer and praise, together with the ordinances peculiar to the Christian religion, are the appointed means of raising the heart towards the Supreme Being. They are the instituted signs of devotion; the language in which it naturally expresses itself. But let us remember, that they are signs and expressions only; and we all know, that, in various cases, these may not correspond to the thing signified. It is in the disposition of the heart, not in the motion of the lips, or in the posture of the body, that devotion consists. The heart may pray, or praise, when no words are uttered. But if the heart be unconcerned or ill affected, all the words we can utter, how properly framed soever, are no other than empty and unacceptable sounds in the ear of the Almighty.

In the second place, It is an error to conceive the pleasures and

advantages of devotion to be indiscriminately open to all. Devotion, like many parts of religion, may in some lights be considered as a privilege, and in others as a duty. It is the duty of all, to love God, and to resign themselves to his will. But it is the privilege of good men only, to rejoice in God, and to confide in his friendship. Hence a certain preparation is requisite, for the enjoyment of devotion in its whole extent. Not only must the life be reformed from gross enormities, but the heart must have undergone that change which the Gospel demands. A competent knowledge of God must be acquired. A proper foundation must be laid in faith and repentance, for intercourse with Heaven.

They who would rush all at once from the arms of the world, into the sacred retreat of devotion; they who imagine that retreat to stand always ready for the reception of such as betake themselves to it, for no reason, but because every other refuge excludes them, betray gross ignorance of this part of religion. They bring to it, faculties unqualified to taste its pleasures; and they grasp at hopes, to which they are not entitled. By incorporating with devotion the unnatural mixture of their unsanctified passions, they defile and corrupt it. Hence that gloom which has often spread over it. Hence those superstitious mortifications and austerities, by which the falsely devout hope to purchase favour from God; haunted by the terrors of a guilty conscience, and vainly struggling to substitute a servile and cringing homage, in the room of the pure affections of a renewed heart. On such altars the hallowed fire of true devotion cannot burn; nor can any incense ascend from them, that shall be grateful to Heaven. *Bring no more vain oblations. Wash ye, make you clean, put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes, saith the Lord. Cease to do evil; learn to do well. Then draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you.* — But though devotion requires a pure heart, and a virtuous life, and necessarily supposes the exercise of frequent retirement, I must observe,

In the third place, That it is an error to conceive it as requiring an entire retreat from the world. Devotion, like every other branch of religion, was intended to fit us for discharging the duties of life. We serve God, by being useful to one another. It is evident from the frame of our nature, and from our common necessities and wants, that we were designed by Providence for an active part on this earth. The Gospel of Christ, accordingly, considers us as engaged in the concerns of the world; and directs its exhortations to men, in all the various relations, characters, and employments of civil life. Abstraction from society, therefore, and total dedication of our time to devout exercises, cannot be the most proper method of acquiring the favour of God.

I mean not, however, to throw any blame on those, who, having lost all relish for the ordinary pursuits of life, in consequence of severe wounds which they have received from affliction; who, being left to stand alone, and discerning their connexions with the world to be in some measure broken off, choose to seek tranquillity in a religious retirement, and to consecrate their days entirely to God. Situ-

ations sometimes occur, which both justify a great degree of retreat from the world, and entitle it to respect. But with regard to the bulk of mankind, Christian devotion neither requires nor implies any such sequestration from the affairs of men. Nay, for the most part, it will be cultivated with greater success, by those who mingle it with the active employments of life. For the mind, when entirely occupied by any one object, is in hazard of viewing it at last through a false medium. Objects, especially so great and sublime as those of devotion, when we attempt to fix upon them unremitting attention, overstretch and disorder our feeble powers. The mind, by being relaxed, returns to them with more advantage. As none of our organs can bear intense sensations without injury; as the eye, when dazzled with overpowering light, beholds imaginary colours, and loses the real distinction of objects; so the mind, when overheated by perpetual contemplation of celestial things, has been sometimes found to mistake the strong impressions of fancy, for supernatural communications from above. To the employments of devotion, as to all other things, there are due limits. There is a certain temperate sphere, within which it preserves longest its proper exertion, and most successfully promotes the purposes for which it was designed.

IN the fourth place, It is an error to imagine, that devotion enjoins a total contempt of all the pleasures and amusements of human society. It checks, indeed, that spirit of dissipation which is too prevalent. It not only prohibits pleasures which are unlawful, but likewise that unlawful degree of attachment to pleasures in themselves innocent, which withdraws the attention of man from what is serious and important. But it brings amusement under due limitation, without extirpating it. It forbids it as the business, but permits it as the relaxation, of life. For there is nothing in the spirit of true religion, which is hostile to a cheerful enjoyment of our situation in the world.

THEY who look with a severe and indignant eye upon all the recreations by which the cares of men are relieved, and the union of society is cemented, are, in two respects, injurious to religion. First, they exhibit it to others under a forbidding form, by clothing it with the garb of so much unnecessary austerity. And next, they deprive the world of the benefit which their example might afford, in drawing the line between innocent and dangerous pleasures. By a temperate participation of those which are innocent, they might successfully exert that authority which a virtuous and respectable character always possesses, in restraining undue excess. They would show the young and unwary, at what point they ought to stop. They would have it in their power to regulate, in some degree, the public manners; to check extravagance, to humble presumption, and put vice to the blush. But, through injudicious severity, they fall short of the good they might perform. By an indiscriminate censure of all amusement, they detract from the weight of their reproof, when amusement becomes undoubtedly sinful. By totally withdrawing themselves from the circle of cheerful life, they deliver up the entertainments of society into the hands of the loose and the corrupted; and

permit the blind power of fashion, uncontrolled, to establish its own standards, and to exercise its dangerous sway over the world.

IN the fifth place, It is an error to believe, that devotion nourishes a spirit of severity, in judging of the manners and characters of others. Under this reproach, indeed, it has so long suffered in the world, that, with too many, the appellation of devout, suggests no other character, but that of a sour and recluse bigot, who delights in censure. But the reproach is unjust; for such a spirit is entirely opposite to the nature of true devotion. The very first traces which it imprints on the mind, are candour and humility. Its principles are liberal. Its genius is unassuming and mild. Severe only to itself, it makes every allowance for others which humanity can suggest. It claims no privilege of looking into their hearts, or of deciding with respect to their eternal state. — If your supposed devotion produce contrary effects; if it infuse harshness into your sentiments, and aërimony into your speech; you may conclude, that, under a serious appearance, carnal passions lurk. And, if ever it shall so far lift you up with self-conceit, as to make you establish your own opinions as an infallible standard for the whole Christian world, and lead you to consign to perdition all who differ from you, either in some doctrinal tenets, or in the mode of expressing them; you may rest assured, that to much pride you have joined much ignorance, both of the nature of devotion, and of the Gospel of Christ. Finally,

IN the sixth place, It is an error to think, that perpetual rapture and spiritual joy belong to devotion. Devout feelings admit very different degrees of warmth and exaltation. Some persons, by the frame of their minds, are much more susceptible than others of the tender emotions. They more readily relent at the view of Divine goodness, glow with a warmer ardour of love, and, by consequence, rise to a higher elevation of joy and hope. But, in the midst of still and calm affections, devotion often dwells; and, though it produce no transports in the mind, diffuses over it a steady serenity. Devout sensations not only vary in their degree, according to the frame of different tempers; but, even among the best disposed, suffer much interruption and decay. It were too much to expect, that, in the present state of human frailty, those happy feelings should be uniform and constant. Oppression of worldly cares, languor of spirits, and infirmities of health, frequently indispose us for the enjoyment of devout affections. Pious men, on these occasions, are in hazard of passing judgment on their own state with too much severity; as if, for some great iniquity, they were condemned by God to final hardness of heart. Hence arises that melancholy, which has been seen to overcloud them; and which has given occasion to many contemptuous scoffs of ungodly men. But it is a melancholy which deserves to be treated with tenderness, not with contempt. It is the excess of virtuous and pious sensibility. It is the overflowing of a heart affected, in an extreme degree, with the humble sense of its own failings, and with ardent concern to attain the favour of God. A weakness, however, we admit it to be, though not a crime; and hold it to be perfectly separable from the essence of devotion. For

contrition, though it may melt, ought not to sink or overpower the heart of a Christian. The tear of repentance brings its own relief. Religion is a spring of consolation, not of terrour, to every well-informed mind, which, in a proper manner, rests its hope on the infinite goodness of God, and the all-sufficient merit of Christ.

To conclude. Let us remove from devotion all those mistakes, to which the corruptions of men, or their ignorance and prejudices, have given rise. With us, let it be the worship of God, *in spirit and in truth*; the elevation of the soul towards him in simplicity and love. Let us pursue it as the principle of virtuous conduct, and of inward peace; by frequent and serious meditation on the great objects of religion, let us lay ourselves open to its influence. By means of the institutions of the Gospel, let us cherish its impressions. And, above all, let us pray to God, that he may establish its power in our heart. For here, if any where, his assistance is requisite. The spirit of devotion is his gift. From his inspiration it proceeds. Towards him it tends; and in his presence, hereafter, it shall attain its full perfection.

SERMON XI.

ON THE DUTIES OF THE YOUNG.

TITUS, ii. 6.

Young men likewise exhort, to be sober-minded.

SOBRIETY of mind is one of those virtues which the present condition of human life strongly inculcates. The uncertainty of its enjoyments checks presumption; the multiplicity of its dangers demands perpetual caution. Moderation, vigilance, and self-government, are duties incumbent on all; but especially on such as are beginning the journey of life. To them, therefore, the admonition in the Text is, with great propriety, directed; though there is reason to fear, that by them it is in hazard of being least regarded. Experience enforces the admonition on the most giddy, after they have advanced in years. But the whole state of youthful views and passions is adverse to sobriety of mind. The scenes which present themselves, at our entering upon the world, are commonly flattering. Whatever they be in themselves, the lively spirits of the young gild every opening prospect. The field of hope appears to stretch wide before them. Pleasure seems to put forth its blossoms on every side. Impelled by desire, forward they rush with inconsiderate ardour. Prompt to decide, and to choose; averse to hesitate, or to inquire; credulous, because untaught by experience; rash, because unacquainted with danger; headstrong, because unsubdued by disappointment. Hence arise the perils, of which it is my design, at present to warn them. I shall take *sobriety of mind*, in its most comprehensive sense, as including the whole of that discipline which religion and virtue prescribe to youth. Though the words of the Text are directly addressed to

young men, yet, as the same admonition is given in a preceding verse to the other sex, the instructions which arise from the Text are to be considered as common to both. I intend, first, to show them the importance of beginning early to give serious attention to their conduct; and, next, to point out those virtues which they ought chiefly to cultivate.

As soon as you are capable of reflection, you must perceive that there is a right and a wrong in human actions. You see, that those who are born with the same advantages of fortune, are not all equally prosperous in the course of life. While some of them, by wise and steady conduct, attain distinction in the world, and pass their days with comfort and honour; others of the same rank, by mean and vicious behaviour, forfeit the advantages of their birth, involve themselves in much misery, and end in being a disgrace to their friends, and a burden on society. Early, then, you may learn, that it is not on the external condition in which you find yourselves placed, but on the part which you are to act, that your welfare or unhappiness, your honour or infamy, depend. Now, when beginning to act that part, what can be of greater moment than to regulate your plan of conduct with the most serious attention, before you have yet committed any fatal or irrecoverable errors? If, instead of exerting reflection for this valuable purpose, you deliver yourselves up, at so critical a time, to sloth and pleasure; if you refuse to listen to any counsellor-but humour, or to attend to any pursuit except that of amusement; if you allow yourselves to float loose and careless on the tide of life, ready to receive any direction which the current of fashion may chance to give you, what can you expect to follow from such beginnings? While so many around you are undergoing the sad consequences of a like indiscretion, for what reason shall not those consequences extend to you? Shall you attain success without that preparation, and escape dangers without that precaution, which is required of others? Shall happiness grow up to you of its own accord, and solicit your acceptance, when, to the rest of mankind, it is the fruit of long cultivation, and the acquisition of labour and care? Do not trust yourselves with such arrogant hopes. Whatever be your rank, Providence will not, for your sake, reverse its established order. The Author of your being hath enjoined you to *take heed to your ways; to ponder the paths of your feet; to remember your Creator in the days of your youth*. He hath decreed, that they only who *seek after wisdom shall find it; that fools shall be afflicted, because of their transgressions; and that, whoso refuseth instruction shall destroy his own soul*. By listening to these admonitions, and tempering the vivacity of youth with a proper mixture of serious thought, you may ensure cheerfulness for the rest of life; but by delivering yourselves up at present to giddiness and levity, you lay the foundation of lasting heaviness of heart.

When you look forward to those plans of life, which either your circumstances have suggested, or your friends have proposed, you will not hesitate to acknowledge, that, in order to pursue them with advantage, some previous discipline is requisite. Be assured, that,

whatever is to be your profession, no education is more necessary to your success, than the acquirement of virtuous dispositions and habits. This is the universal preparation for every character, and every station in life. Bad as the world is, respect is always paid to virtue. In the usual course of human affairs, it will be found, that a plain understanding, joined with acknowledged worth, contributes more to prosperity, than the brightest parts without probity or honour. Whether science, or business, or public life, be your aim, virtue still enters, for a principal share, into all those great departments of society. It is connected with eminence, in every liberal art; with reputation, in every branch of fair and useful business; with distinction, in every public station. The vigour which it gives the mind, and the weight which it adds to character; the generous sentiments which it breathes, the undaunted spirit which it inspires, the ardour of diligence which it quickens, the freedom which it procures from pernicious and dishonourable avocations, are the foundations of all that is high in fame, or great in success, among men.

Whatever ornamental or engaging endowments you now possess, virtue is a necessary requisite, in order to their shining with proper lustre. Feeble are the attractions of the fairest form, if it be suspected that nothing within corresponds to the pleasing appearance without. Short are the triumphs of wit, when it is supposed to be the vehicle of malice. By whatever arts you may at first attract the attention, you can hold the esteem, and secure the hearts of others, only by amiable dispositions, and the accomplishments of the mind. These are the qualities whose influence will last, when the lustre of all that once sparkled and dazzled has passed away.

Let not then the season of youth be barren of improvements so essential to your future felicity and honour. Now is the seed-time of life; and according to *what you sow, you shall reap*. Your character is now, under Divine assistance, of your own forming; your fate is, in some measure, put into your own hands. Your nature is as yet pliant and soft. Habits have not established their dominion. Prejudices have not pre-occupied your understanding. The world has not had time to contract and debase your affections. All your powers are more vigorous, disembarassed, and free, than they will be at any future period. Whatever impulse you now give to your desires and passions, the direction is likely to continue. It will form the channel in which your life is to run; nay, it may determine its everlasting issue. Consider then the employment of this important period, as the highest trust which shall ever be committed to you; as, in a great measure, decisive of your happiness, in time, and in eternity. As in the succession of the seasons, each, by the invariable laws of Nature, affects the productions of what is next in course; so, in human life, every period of our age, according as it is well or ill spent, influences the happiness of that which is to follow. Virtuous youth gradually brings forward accomplished and flourishing manhood; and such manhood passes of itself, without uneasiness, into respectable and tranquil old age. But when nature is turned out of its regular course, disorder takes place in the moral, just as in the vegetable world. If

the Spring put forth no blossoms, in Summer there will be no beauty, and in Autumn no fruit. So if youth be trifled away without improvement, manhood will be contemptible, and old age miserable. If the beginnings of life have been *vanity*, its latter end can be no other than *veiation of spirit*.

Having thus shown the importance of beginning early to give serious attention to conduct, I come, next, to point out the virtues which are most necessary to be cultivated in youth. What I shall,

I. RECOMMEND, is piety to God. With this I begin, both as a foundation of good morals, and as a disposition particularly graceful and becoming in youth. To be void of it, argues a cold heart, destitute of some of the best affections which belong to that age. Youth is the season of warm and generous emotions. The heart should then, spontaneously, rise into the admiration of what is great, glow with the love of what is fair and excellent, and melt at the discovery of tenderness and goodness. Where can any object be found, so proper to kindle those affections, as the Father of the universe, and the Author of all felicity? Unmoved by veneration, can you contemplate that grandeur and majesty, which his works every-where display? Untouched by gratitude, can you view that profusion of good, which, in this pleasing season of life, his beneficent hand pours around you? Happy in the love and affection of those with whom you are connected, look up to the Supreme Being, as the inspirer of all the friendship which has ever been shown you by others; himself, your best and your first friend; formerly, the supporter of your infancy, and the guide of your childhood; now, the guardian of your youth, and the hope of your coming years. View religious homage, as a natural expression of gratitude to him for all his goodness. Consider it as the service of the *God of your fathers*; of him, to whom your parents devoted you; of him, whom in former ages your ancestors honoured; and by whom they are now rewarded, and blessed in Heaven. Connected with so many tender sensibilities of soul, let religion be with you, not the cold and barren offspring of speculation, but the warm and vigorous dictate of the heart.

But though piety chiefly belongs to the heart, yet the aid of the understanding is requisite, to give a proper direction to the devout affections. You must endeavour, therefore, to acquire just views, both of the great principles of natural religion, and of the peculiar doctrines of the Gospel. For this end, study the sacred Scriptures. Consult the word of God, more than the systems of men, if you would know the truth in its native purity. When, upon rational and sober inquiry, you have established your principles, suffer them not to be shaken by the scoffs of the licentious, or the cavils of the sceptical. Remember, that in the examination of every great and comprehensive plan, such as that of Christianity, difficulties may be expected to occur, and that reasonable evidence is not to be rejected, because the nature of our present state allows us only to *know in part, and so see through a glass, darkly*.

Impress your minds with reverence for all that is sacred. Let no wantonness of youthful spirits, no compliance with the intemperate

mirth of others, ever betray you into prophane sallies. Besides the guilt which is thereby incurred, nothing gives a more odious appearance of petulance and presumption to youth, than the affectation of treating religion with levity. Instead of being an evidence of superior understanding, it discovers a pert and shallow mind; which, vain of the first smatterings of knowledge, presumes to make light of what the rest of mankind revere.

At the same time you are not to imagine, that when exhorted to be religious, you are called upon to become more formal and solemn in your manners than others of the same years, or to erect yourselves into supercilious reprovers of those around you. The spirit of true religion breathes gentleness and affability. It gives a native, unaffected ease to the behaviour. It is social, kind, and cheerful; far removed from that gloomy and illiberal superstition which clouds the brow, sharpens the temper, dejects the spirit, and teaches men to fit themselves for another world, by neglecting the concerns of this. Let your religion, on the contrary, connect preparation for heaven, with an honourable discharge of the duties of active life. Let it be associated in your imagination, with all that is manly and useful; *with whatsoever things are true, are just, are pure, are lovely, are of good report*, wherever there is any virtue, and wherever there is any praise. Of such religion discover, on every proper occasion, that you are not ashamed; but avoid making any unnecessary ostentation of it before the world.

II. To piety, join modesty and docility, reverence of your parents, and submission to those who are your superiours in knowledge, in station, and in years. Dependence and obedience belong to youth. Modesty is one of its chief ornaments; and has ever been esteemed a presage of rising merit. When entering on the career of life, it is your part, not to assume the reins as yet into your hands; but to commit yourselves to the guidance of the more experienced, and to become wise by the wisdom of those who have gone before you.

Of all the follies incident to youth, there are none which either deform its present appearance, or blast the prospect of its future prosperity, more than self-conceit, presumption, and obstinacy. By checking its natural progress in improvement, they fix it in long immaturity; and frequently produce mischiefs, which can never be repaired. Yet these are vices too commonly found among the young. Big with enterprise, and elated by hope, they resolve to trust for success to none but themselves. Full of their own abilities, they deride the admonitions which are given them by their friends, as the timorous suggestions of age. Too wise to learn, too impatient to deliberate, too forward to be restrained, they plunge, with precipitant indiscretion, into the midst of all the dangers with which life abounds. *Seest thou a young man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool, than of him.* — Positive as you now are in your opinions, and confident in your assertions, be assured, that the time approaches when both men and things will appear to you in a different light. Many characters which you now admire, will, by and by, sink in your esteem; and many opinions, of which you are at present most tena-

cious, will alter as you advance in years. Distrust, therefore, that glare of youthful presumption, which dazzles your eyes. Abound not in your own sense. Put not yourselves forward with too much eagerness; nor imagine, that, by the impetuosity of juvenile ardour, you can overturn systems which have been long established, and change the face of the world. *Learn not to think more highly of yourselves than you ought to think, but to think soberly.* By patient and gradual progression in improvement, you may, in due time, command lasting esteem; but by assuming, at present, a tone of superiority, to which you have no title, you will disgust those whose approbation it is most important to gain. Forward vivacity may fit you to be the companion of an idle hour. More solid qualities must recommend you to the wise, and mark you out for importance and consideration in subsequent life.

III. It is necessary to recommend to you, sincerity and truth. This is the basis of every virtue. That darkness of character, where we can see no heart; those foldings of art, through which no native affection is allowed to penetrate, present an object, unamiable in every season of life, but particularly odious in youth. If, at an age when the heart is warm, when the emotions are strong, and when nature is expected to show itself free and open, you can already smile and deceive, what are we to look for when you shall be longer hackneyed in the ways of men; when interest shall have completed the obduration of your heart, and experience shall have improved you in all the arts of guile? Dissimulation in youth, is the fore-runner of perfidy in old age. Its first appearance is the fatal omen of growing depravity, and future shame. It degrades parts and learning; obscures the lustre of every accomplishment; and sinks you into contempt with God and man.

As you value, therefore, the approbation of Heaven, or the esteem of the world, cultivate the love of truth. In all your proceedings, be direct and consistent. Ingenuity and candour possess the most powerful charm; they bespeak universal favour, and carry an apology for almost every failing. *The lip of truth shall be established for ever; but a lying tongue is but for a moment.** The path of truth, is a plain and a safe path; that of falsehood, is a perplexing maze. After the first departure from sincerity, it is not in your power to stop. One artifice unavoidably leads on to another; till, as the intricacy of the labyrinth increases, you are left entangled in your own snare. Deceit discovers a little mind, which stops at temporary expedients, without rising to comprehensive views of conduct. It betrays, at the same time, a dastardly spirit. It is the resource of one who wants courage to avow his designs, or to rest upon himself. Whereas, openness of character displays that generous boldness which ought to distinguish youth. To set out in the world with no other principle than a crafty attention to interest, betokens one who is destined for creeping through the inferiour walks of life. But to give an early preference to honour above gain, when they stand in competition; to despise every advantage which cannot be attained without dishonest

arts; to brook no meanness, and to stoop to no dissimulation; are the indications of a great mind, the presages of future eminence and distinction in life.

At the same time this virtuous sincerity is perfectly consistent with the most prudent vigilance and caution. It is opposed to cunning, not to true wisdom. It is not the simplicity of a weak and improvident, but the candour of an enlarged and noble mind; of one who scorns deceit, because he accounts it both base and unprofitable; and who seeks no disguise, because he needs none to hide him. *Lord! who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall ascend into thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart.*

IV. YOUTH is the proper season of cultivating the benevolent and humane affections. As a great part of your happiness is to depend on the connexions which you form with others, it is of high importance that you acquire, betimes, the temper and the manners which will render such connexions comfortable. Let a sense of justice be the foundation of all your social qualities. In your most early intercourse with the world, and even in your youthful amusements, let no unfairness be found. Engrave on your mind that sacred rule, of *doing all things to others, according as you wish that they should do unto you.* For this end, impress yourselves with a deep sense of the original and natural equality of men. Whatever advantages of birth or fortune you possess, never display them with an ostentatious superiority. Leave the subordinations of rank, to regulate the intercourse of more advanced years. At present, it becomes you to act among your companions, as man with man. Remember how unknown to you are the vicissitudes of the world, and how often they, on whom ignorant and contemptuous young men once looked down with scorn, have risen to be their superiours in future years.

Compassion is an emotion of which you ought never to be ashamed. Graceful in youth is the tear of sympathy, and the heart that melts at the tale of woe. Let not ease and indulgence contract your affections, and wrap you up in selfish enjoyment. But go sometimes to the house of mourning, as well as to the house of feasting. Accustom yourselves to think of the distresses of human life; of the solitary cottage, the dying parent, and the weeping orphan. *Thou shalt not harden thy heart, nor shut thy hand from thy poor brother; but thou shalt surely give unto him in the day of his need: And thine heart shall not be grieved when thou givest unto him; because that for this thing, the Lord thy God shall bless thee in all thy works.** Never sport with pain and distress, in any of your amusements; nor treat even the meanest insect with wanton cruelty.

In young minds, there is commonly a strong propensity to particular intimacies and friendships. Youth, indeed, is the season when friendships are sometimes formed, which not only continue through succeeding life, but which glow to the last, with a tenderness unknown to the connexions begun in cooler years. The propensity, therefore, is not to be discouraged; though, at the same time, it must be regu-

* Deut. xv. 7. 10.

lated with much circumspection and care. Too many of the pretended friendships of youth, are mere combinations in pleasure. They are often founded on capricious likings; suddenly contracted, and as suddenly dissolved. Sometimes they are the effect of interested complaisance and flattery on the one side, and of credulous fondness on the other. Beware of such rash and dangerous connexions, which may afterwards load you with dishonour. Remember, that by the character of those whom you choose for your friends, your own is likely to be formed, and will certainly be judged of by the world. Be slow, therefore, and cautious in contracting intimacy; but when a virtuous friendship is once established, consider it as a sacred engagement. Expose not yourselves to the reproach of lightness and inconstancy, which always bespeak either a trifling, or a base mind. Reveal none of the secrets of your friend. Be faithful to his interests. Forsake him not in danger. Abhor the thought of acquiring any advantage by his prejudice or hurt. *There is a friend that loveth at all times, and a brother that is born for adversity. Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not.**

Finally, on this head; in order to render yourselves amiable in society, correct every appearance of harshness in behaviour. Let that courtesy distinguish your demeanour, which springs, not so much from studied politeness, as from a mild and gentle heart. Follow the customs of the world in matters indifferent; but stop when they become sinful. Let your manners be simple and natural; and of course they will be engaging: Affectation is certain deformity. By forming themselves on fantastic models, and vying with one another in every reigning folly, the young begin with being ridiculous, and end in being vicious and immoral.

V. LET me particularly exhort youth to temperance in pleasure: Let me admonish them, to beware of that rock on which thousands, from race to race, continue to split. The love of pleasure, natural to man, in every period of his life, glows at this age with excessive ardour. Novelty adds fresh charms, as yet, to every gratification. The world appears to spread a continual feast; and health, vigour, and high spirits, invite them to partake of it without restraint. In vain we warn them of latent dangers. Religion is accused of insufferable severity, in prohibiting enjoyment; and the old, when they offer their admonitions, are upbraided with having forgot that they once were young.—And yet, my friends, to what do the restraints of religion, and the counsels of age, with respect to pleasure, amount? They may all be comprised in few words, not to hurt yourselves, and not to hurt others, by your pursuit of pleasure. Within these bounds, pleasure is lawful; beyond them, it becomes criminal, because it is ruinous. Are these restraints any other than what a wise man would choose to impose on himself? We call you not to renounce pleasure, but to enjoy it in safety. Instead of abridging it, we exhort you to pursue it on an extensive plan. We propose measures for securing its possession, and for prolonging its duration.

Consult your whole nature. Consider yourselves not only as sen-

* Prov. xvii. 17. xxvii. 10.

sitive, but as rational beings; not only as rational, but social; not only as social, but immortal. Whatever violates your nature in any of these respects, cannot afford true pleasure; any more than that which undermines an essential part of the vital system can promote health. For the truth of this conclusion, we appeal, not merely to the authority of religion, nor to the testimony of the aged, but to yourselves and your own experience. We ask, Whether you have not found, that in a course of criminal excess, your pleasure was more than compensated by succeeding pain? Whether, if not from every particular instance, yet from every habit, at least, of unlawful gratification, there did not spring some thorn to wound you, there did not arise some consequence to make you repent of it in the issue? *How long then, ye simple ones! will ye love simplicity? How long repeat the same round of pernicious folly, and tamely expose yourselves to be caught in the same snare? If you have any consideration, or any firmness left, avoid temptations, for which you have found yourselves unequal, with as much care, as you would shun pestilential infection. Break off all connexions with the loose and profligate. When sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Look not on the wine when it is red, when it giveth its colour in the cup: for at the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder. Remove thy way from the strange woman, and come not near the door of her house. Let not thine heart incline to her ways; for her house is the way to hell. Thou goest after her as a bird hasteth to the snare, and knoweth not that it is for his life.*

By these unhappy excesses of irregular pleasure in youth, how many amiable dispositions are corrupted or destroyed! How many rising capacities and powers are suppressed! How many flattering hopes of parents and friends are totally extinguished! Who but must drop a tear over human nature, when he beholds that morning which arose so bright, overcast with such untimely darkness; that good humour which once captivated all hearts, that vivacity which sparkled in every company, those abilities which were fitted for adorning the highest station, all sacrificed at the shrine of low sensuality; and one who was formed for running the fair career of life in the midst of public esteem, cut off by his vices at the beginning of his course, or sunk, for the whole of it, into insignificancy and contempt! — These, O sinful Pleasure! are thy trophies. It is thus that, co-operating with the foe of God and man, thou degrades human honour, and blatest the opening prospects of human felicity.

VI. DILIGENCE, industry, and proper improvement of time, are material duties of the young. To no purpose are they endowed with the best abilities, if they want activity for exerting them. Unavailing, in this case, will be every direction that can be given them, either for their temporal or spiritual welfare. In youth the habits of industry are most easily acquired. In youth, the incentives to it are strongest, from ambition and from duty, from emulation and hope, from all the prospects which the beginning of life affords. If, dead to these calls, you already languish in slothful inaction, what will be able to quicken the more sluggish current of advancing years?

Industry is not only the instrument of improvement, but the found-

ation of pleasure. Nothing is so opposite to the true enjoyment of life, as the relaxed and feeble state of an indolent mind. He who is a stranger to industry, may possess, but he cannot enjoy. For it is labour only which gives the relish to pleasure. It is the appointed vehicle of every good to man. It is the indispensable condition of our possessing a sound mind in a sound body. Sloth is so inconsistent with both, that it is hard to determine whether it be a greater foe to virtue, or to health and happiness. Inactive as it is in itself, its effects are fatally powerful. Though it appear a slowly flowing stream, yet it undermines all that is stable and flourishing. It not only saps the foundation of every virtue, but pours upon you a deluge of crimes and evils. It is like water, which first putrefies by stagnation, and then sends up noxious vapours, and fills the atmosphere with death.

Fly, therefore, from idleness, as the certain parent both of guilt and of ruin. And under idleness I include, not mere inaction only, but all that circle of trifling occupations, in which too many saunter away their youth; perpetually engaged in frivolous society, or public amusements; in the labours of dress, or the ostentation of their persons.—Is this the foundation which you lay for future usefulness and esteem? By such accomplishments do you hope to recommend yourselves to the thinking part of the world, and to answer the expectations of your friends, and your country?—Amusements, youth requires.* It were vain, it were cruel to prohibit them. But, though allowable as the relaxation, they are most culpable as the business, of the young. For they then become the gulph of time, and the poison of the mind. They foment bad passions. They weaken the manly powers. They sink the native vigour of youth into contemptible effeminacy.

Redeeming your time from such dangerous waste, seek to fill it with employments which you may review with satisfaction. The acquisition of knowledge is one of the most honourable occupations of youth. The desire of it discovers a liberal mind, and is connected with many accomplishments, and many virtues. But though your train of life should not lead you to study, the course of education always furnishes proper employments to a well-disposed mind. Whatever you pursue, be emulous to excel. Generous ambition, and sensibility to praise, are, especially at your age, among the marks of virtue. Think not, that any affluence of fortune, or any elevation of rank, exempts you from the duties of application and industry. Industry is the law of our being; it is the demand of Nature, of Reason, and of God. Remember always, that the years which now pass over your heads, leave permanent memorials behind them. From your thoughtless minds they may escape; but they remain in the remembrance of God. They form an important part of the register of your life. They will hereafter bear testimony, either for or against you, at that day, when, for all your actions, but particularly for the employments of youth, you must give an account to God.

Thus I have set before you some of the chief qualifications which belong to that *sober mind*, that virtuous and religious character, which

the Apostle in my Text recommends to youth; piety, modesty, truth, benevolence, temperance, and industry. Whether your future course is destined to be long or short, after this manner it should commence; and, if it continue to be thus conducted, its conclusion, 'at what time soever it arrives, will not be inglorious or unhappy. For, *honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, or that which is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the grey hair to man, and an unspotted life is old age.*

LET me finish the subject, with recalling your attention to that dependence on the blessing of Heaven, which, amidst all your endeavours after improvement, you ought continually to preserve. It is too common with the young, even when they resolve to tread the path of virtue and honour, to set out with presumptuous confidence in themselves. Trusting to their own abilities for carrying them successfully through life, they are careless of applying to God, or of deriving any assistance from what they are apt to reckon the gloomy discipline of religion. Alas! how little do they know the dangers which await them? Neither human wisdom, nor human virtue, unsupported by religion, are equal to the trying situations which often occur in life. By the shock of temptation, how frequently have the most virtuous intentions been overthrown? Under the pressure of disaster, how often has the greatest constancy sunk? *Every good, and every perfect gift, is from above.* Wisdom and virtue, as well as *riches and honour, come from God.* Destitute of his favour, you are in no better situation, with all your boasted abilities, than orphans left to wander in a trackless desert, without any guide to conduct them, or any shelter to cover them from the gathering storm. Correct, then, this ill-founded arrogance. Expect not, that your happiness can be independent of him who made you. By faith and repentance, apply to the Redeemer of the world. By piety and prayer, seek the protection of the God of Heaven. I conclude with the solemn words, in which a great Prince delivered his dying charge to his son; words which every young person ought to consider as addressed to himself, and to engrave deeply on his heart: *Thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy fathers; and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind. For the Lord searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts. If thou seek him, he will be found of thee; but if thou forsake him, he will cast thee off for ever.**

SERMON XII.

ON THE DUTIES AND CONSOLATIONS OF THE AGED.

PROVERBS, xvi. 31.

The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.

To fear God, and to keep his commandments, is the rule of our duty, in every period of life: But as the light which guides our steps,

* 1 Chron. xxviii. 9.

varies with the progress of the day, so the rule of religious conduct is diversified in its application by the different stages of our present existence. To every age, there belongs a distinct propriety of behaviour. There arises from it a series of duties peculiar to itself.

Of those which are incumbent on youth, I have treated in the preceding Discourse. As we advance from youth to middle age, a new field of action opens, and a different character is required. The flow of gay and impetuous spirits begins to subside. Life gradually assumes a graver cast; the mind a more sedate and thoughtful turn. The attention is now transferred from pleasure to interest; that is, to pleasure diffused over a wider extent, and measured by a larger scale. Formerly, the enjoyment of the present moment occupied the whole attention. Now, no action terminates ultimately in itself, but refers to some more distant aim. Wealth and power, the instruments of lasting gratification, are now coveted more than any single pleasure. Prudence and foresight lay their plans. Industry carries on its patient efforts. Activity pushes forward; address winds around. Here, an enemy is to be overcome; there, a rival to be displaced. Competitions warm; and the strife of the world thickens on every side. To guide men through this busy period without loss of integrity; to guard them against the temptations which arise from mistaken or interfering interests; to call them from worldly pursuits to serious thoughts of their spiritual concerns, is the great office of religion.

But as this includes, in a great measure, the whole compass of moral duty, as the general strain of religious exhortation is addressed to those who are in this season of life; a delineation of the virtues properly belonging to middle age may appear unnecessary, and would lead us into too wide a field. Let us therefore turn our view to a bounded prospect; and contemplate a period of life, the duties of which are circumscribed within narrower limits. Old age is a stage of the human course, which every one hopes to reach; and therefore the consideration of it interests us all. It is a period justly entitled to general respect. Even its failings ought to be touched with a gentle hand; and though the petulant, and the vain, may despise the *hoary head*; yet the wisest of men has asserted in the Text, that when *found in the way of righteousness, it is a crown of glory*. I shall first offer some counsels, concerning the errors which are most incident to the aged. Secondly, I shall suggest the peculiar duties they ought to practise; and, thirdly, point out the consolations they may enjoy.

I. As the follies and vices of youth are chiefly derived from inexperience and presumption; so almost all the errors of age may be traced up to the feebleness and distresses peculiar to that time of life. Though, in every part of life, vexations occur, yet, in former years, either business, or pleasure, served to obliterate their impression, by supplying occupation to the mind. Old age begins its advances with disqualifying men for relishing the one, and for taking an active part in the other. While it withdraws their accustomed supports, it imposes, at the same time, the additional burden of growing infirmities. In the former stages of their journey, hope continued to flatter them with many a fair and enticing prospect. But in proportion as old

age increases, those pleasing illusions vanish. Life is contracted within a narrow and barren circle. Year after year steals somewhat away from their store of comfort, deprives them of some of their ancient friends, blunts some of their powers of sensation, or incapacitates them for some function of life.

Though, in the plan of Providence, it is wisely ordered, that before we are called away from the world, our attachment to it should be gradually loosened; though it be fit in itself, that, as in the day of human life, there is a morning and a noon, so there should be an evening also, when the lengthening shadows shall admonish us of approaching night; yet we have no reason to be surprised, if they who are arrived at this dejecting season feel and lament the change which they suffer. The complaints, therefore, of the aged, should meet with tenderness, rather than censure. The burden under which they labour, ought to be viewed with sympathy, by those who must bear it in their turn, and who, perhaps, hereafter may complain of it as bitterly. At the same time, the old should consider, that all the seasons of life have their several trials allotted to them; and that to bear the infirmities of age with becoming patience, is as much their duty, as is that of the young to resist the temptations of youthful pleasure. By calmly enduring, for the short time that remains, what Providence is pleased to inflict, they both express a resignation most acceptable to God, and recommend themselves to the esteem and assistance of all who are around them.

But though the querulous temper imputed to old age is to be considered as a natural infirmity, rather than as a vice; the same apology cannot be made for that peevish disgust at the manners, and that malignant censure of the enjoyments, of the young, which is sometimes found to accompany declining years. Nothing can be more unjust, than to take offence at others, on account of their partaking of pleasures, which it is past your time to enjoy. By indulging this fretful temper, you both aggravate the uneasiness of age, and you alienate those on whose affection much of your comfort depends. In order to make the two extremes of life unite in amicable society, it is greatly to be wished, that the young would look forward, and consider that they shall one day be old; and that the old would look back, and, remembering that they once were young, make proper allowances for the temper and the manners of youth.

But, instead of this, it is too common to find the aged at declared enmity with the whole system of present customs and manners; perpetually complaining of the growing depravity of the world, and of the astonishing vices and follies of the rising generation. All things, according to them, are rushing fast into ruin. Decency and good order have become extinct, ever since that happy discipline, under which they spent their youth, has passed away.—Part, at least, of this displeasure, you may fairly impute to the infirmity of age, which throws its own gloom on every surrounding object. Similar lamentations were, in the days of your youth, poured forth by your fathers; and they who are now young, shall, when it comes to their turn, inveigh, in the like strain, against those who succeed them. Great has

been the corruption of the world in every age. Sufficient ground there is for the complaints made by serious observers, at all times, of abounding iniquity and folly. But though particular modes of vice prevail in one age more than in others, it does not follow, that on that age all iniquity is accumulated. It is the form, perhaps, more than the quantity of corruption, which makes the distinction. In the worst of times, God has assured us, that there shall be always *a seed who shall serve him.** — *Say not thou, What is the cause that the former days were better than these? for thou dost not enquire wisely concerning this. Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise.*† Former follies pass away, and are forgotten. Those which are present, strike observation, and sharpen censure. Had the depravation of the world continued to increase in proportion to those gloomy calculations which, for so many centuries past, have estimated each race as worse than the preceding, by this time, not one ray of good sense, nor one spark of piety and virtue, must have remained unextinguished among mankind.

One of the vices of old age, which appears the most unaccountable, is that covetous attachment to worldly interest, with which it is often charged. But this, too, can naturally be deduced from the sense of its feebleness and decay. In proportion as the vigour, both of body and mind declines, timidity may be expected to increase. With anxious and fearful eye, the aged look forward to the evils which threaten them, and to the changes which may befall. Hence, they are sometimes apt to overvalue riches, as the instrument of their defence against these dangers, and as the most certain means of securing them against solitude and disrespect. But, though their apprehensions may justify a cautious frugality, they can by no means excuse a sordid avarice. It is no less absurd, than it is culpable, in the old, from the dread of uncertain futurity, to deny themselves the enjoyment of the present; and to increase in anxiety about their journey, in proportion as it draws nearer to its close. There are more effectual methods of commanding respect from the world, than the mere possession of wealth. Let them be charitable, and do good. Let them mix beneficence to their friends, with a cheerful enjoyment of the comforts which befit their state. They will then receive the returns of real respect and love. Whereas, by their riches, they procure no more than pretended demonstrations of regard; while their ill-judged parsimony occasions many secret wishes for their death.

As increasing years debilitate the body, so they weaken the force, and diminish the warmth, of the affections. Chilled by the hand of time, the heart loses that tender sensibility, with which it once entered into the concerns and sorrows of others. It is, in truth, a merciful appointment of Providence, that as they who see many days, must behold many a sad scene, the impressions of grief upon their heart should be blunted by being often repeated; and that, in proportion as their power of advancing the prosperity of others decreases, their participation of the misfortunes of others should also lessen. However, as, in every period of life, humanity and friendship contribute

* Psal. xxii. 30.

† Eccles. vii. 10. 16.

to happiness, it is both the duty and the interest of the aged, to cherish the remains of the kind affections; and from the days of former years, to recal such impressions as may tend to soften their hearts. Let them not, from having suffered much in the course of their long pilgrimage, become callous to the sufferings of others. But, remembering that they still are men, let them study to keep their heart open to the sense of human woe. Practised in the ways of men, they are apt to be suspicious of design and fraud; for the knowledge and the distrust of mankind too often go together. Let not, however, that wary caution, which is the fruit of their experience, degenerate into craft. Experience ought also to have taught them, that amidst all the falsehood of men, integrity is the best defence; and that he who continueth to the end to *walk uprightly*, shall continue to *walk surely*. Having thus offered some admonitions concerning the errors most incident to age, I proceed,

II. To point out the duties which peculiarly belong to it.

The first which I shall mention is, a timely retreat from the world. In every part of life, we are in hazard of being too deeply immersed in its cares. But during its vigorous periods, the impulse of active spirit, the necessary business of our station, and the allowable endeavours to advance our fortune by fair industry, render it difficult to observe due moderation. In old age, all the motives of eager pursuit diminish. The voice of Nature then calls you to leave to others the bustle and contest of the world; and gradually to disengage yourselves from a burden, which begins to exceed your strength. Having borne your share of the heat and labour of the day, let the evening of life be passed in the cool and quiet shade. It is only in the shade, that the virtues of old age can flourish. There, its duties are discharged with more success; and there, its comforts are enjoyed with greatest satisfaction.

By the retreat of old age, however, I do not mean a total cessation from every worldly employment. There is an error in this, as well as in the opposite extreme. Persons who have been long harassed with business and care, sometimes imagine, that when life declines, they cannot make their retirement from the world too complete. But where they expected a delicious enjoyment of leisure and ease, they have often found a melancholy solitude. Few are able, in any period of their days, to bear a total abstraction from the world. There remains a vacancy which they cannot fill up. Incapable of being always employed in the exercises of religion, and often little qualified for the entertainments of the understanding, they are in hazard of becoming a burden to themselves, and to all with whom they are connected. It is, therefore, the duty of the aged, not so much to withdraw entirely from worldly business, as to contract its circle; not so much to break off, as to loosen their communication with active life. Continuing that train of occupation to which they have been most accustomed, let them pursue it with less intenseness; relaxing their efforts, as their powers decline; retiring more and more from public observation, to domestic scenes, and serious thoughts; till, as the decays of life advance, the world shall of itself withdraw to a greater

distance from their view ; its objects shall gradually yield their place to others of more importance ; and its tumults shall sound in their ears, only like a noise which is heard from afar.

If it be the duty of the old, to retreat betimes from the fatigue of worldly care, it is still more incumbent on them to quit the pursuit of such pleasures as are unsuitable to their years. Cheerfulness, in old age, is graceful. It is the natural concomitant of virtue. But the cheerfulness of age is widely different from the levity of youth. Many things are allowable in that early period, which, in maturer years, would deserve censure ; but which, in old age, become both ridiculous and criminal. By awkwardly affecting to imitate the manners, and to mingle in the vanities of the young, as the aged depart from the dignity, so they forfeit the privileges of grey hairs. But if, by follies of this kind, they are degraded, they are exposed to much deeper blame, by descending to vicious pleasure, and continuing to hover round those sinful gratifications to which they were once addicted. Amusement and relaxation the aged require, and may enjoy. But let them consider well, that by every intemperate indulgence, they accelerate decay ; instead of enlivening, they oppress, and precipitate their declining state. Ease, safety, and respect, are the proper enjoyments of age. Within these bounds let it remain, and not vainly attempt to break through that barrier, by which nature has separated the pleasures of youth from the comforts left to the concluding years of life.

A material part of the duty of the aged consists, in studying to be useful to the race who are to succeed them. Here opens to them an extensive field, in which they may so employ themselves, as considerably to advance the interest of religion, and the happiness of mankind. To them it belongs, to impart to the young the fruit of their long experience ; to instruct them in the proper conduct, and to warn them of the various dangers, of life ; by wise counsel, to temper their precipitate ardour ; and, both by precept and example, to form them to piety and virtue.

It is not by rigorous discipline, and unrelaxing austerity, that they can maintain an ascendancy over youthful minds. The constraint which their presence will impose, and the aversion which their manners will create, if the one be constantly awful, and the other severe, tend to frustrate the effect of all their wisdom. They must assume the spirit of the companion, and the friend ; and mix, with the authority of age, a proper degree of indulgence to the manners of the young. Instead of lessening the respect due to their years by such condescension, they take the surest method to increase it. Old age never appears with greater dignity, than, when tempered with mildness, and enlivened with good humour, it acts as the guide and the patron of youth. Religion, displayed in such a character, strikes the beholders, as at once amiable and venerable. They revere its power, when they see it adding so much grace to the decays of nature, and shedding so pleasing a lustre over the evening of life. The young wish to tread in the same steps, and to arrive at the close of their days with equal honour. They listen with attention to counsels which are

mingled with tenderness, and rendered respectable by grey hairs. For, notwithstanding all its presumption, youth naturally bends before superiour knowledge and years. Aged wisdom, when joined with acknowledged virtue, exerts an authority over the human mind, greater even than that which arises from power and station. It can check the most forward, abash the most profligate, and strike with awe the most giddy and unthinking.

In the midst of their endeavours to be useful to others, let not the aged forget those religious employments which their own state particularly requires. The first of these is, reflection on their past behaviour, with a view to discover the errors which they have committed; and, as far as remaining life allows, to apply themselves to repentance and amendment.—Long has the world bewildered you in its maze, and imposed upon you by its arts. The time is now come, when this great seducer should mislead you no more. From the calm station at which you are arrived, sequestered from the crowd of the deceiving and the deceived, review your conduct with the eye of Christians and immortal beings. After all the tumult of life is over, what now remains to afford you solid satisfaction? Have you served God with fidelity, and discharged your part to your fellow-creatures with integrity and a good conscience? Can you look forward without terror to that day which is to dissolve your connexion with this world. and to bring you into the presence of him who made you, in order to give account of your actions?—The retrospect of life is seldom wholly unattended by uneasiness and shame. Though, to the good and the bad, it presents a very different scene; yet, to all men, it recalls much guilt incurred, and much time mis-spent. It too much resembles the review, which a traveller takes from some eminence, of a barren country, through which he has passed, where the heath and the desert form the chief prospect; diversified only by a few scattered spots of imperfect cultivation.

Turn then your thoughts to the proper methods of making your peace with God through Jesus Christ; and implore, from Divine grace, that *new heart*, and *right spirit*, which will fit you for a better world. Let devotion fill up many of those hours which are now vacant from worldly business and care. Let your affections dwell among divine and immortal objects. In silent and thoughtful meditation, walk as on the shore of that vast ocean upon which you are soon to embark. Summon up all the considerations, which should reconcile you to your departure from life; and which may prepare you for going through its last scene, with firmness and decency. Often let your thanksgivings ascend to God, for that watchful care with which he hath hitherto conducted you, through the long journey of life. Often let your prayers be heard, that in what remains of your pilgrimage, he may not forsake you; and that, when you enter into the *valley of the shadow of death*, he may there support you with *his staff*, and defend you with *his rod*.—Amidst such thoughts and cares, let old age find you employed; betaking yourselves to a prudent and timely retreat; disengaged both from the oppressive load of business, and from the unseasonable pursuit of pleasure; applying yourselves

to form the succeeding race, by your counsels, to virtue and wisdom; reviewing seriously your past life; by repentance and devotion, preparing yourselves for a better; and with humble and manly composure, expecting that hour, which Nature cannot now long delay. It remains,

III. To suggest the consolations which belong to old age, when thus found in the way of righteousness.

I must introduce them with observing, That nothing is more reasonable in itself, than to submit patiently to those infirmities of Nature which are brought on by the increase of years. You knew beforehand what you had to expect, when you numbered the successive summers and winters which were passing over your heads. Old age did not attack you by surprise, nor was it forced upon you against your choice. Often, and earnestly, did you wish to *see long life and many days*. When arrived at the desired period, have you any just cause to complain, on account of enduring what the constitution of our being imposes on all? Did you expect, that, for your sake, Providence was to alter its established order? Throughout the whole vegetable, sensible, and rational world, whatever makes progress towards maturity, as soon as it has passed that point, begins to verge towards decay. It is as natural for old age to be frail, as for the stalk to bend under the ripened ear, or for the autumnal leaf to change its hue. To this law, all who went before you, have submitted; and all who shall come after you, must yield. After they have flourished for a season, they shall fade, like you, when the period of decline arrives, and bow under the pressure of years.

During the whole progress of the human course, the principal materials of our comfort, or uneasiness, lie within ourselves. Every age will prove burdensome to those who have no fund of happiness in their own breast. Preserve them, if you could, from infirmity of frame; bestow upon them, if it were possible, perpetual youth; still they would be restless and miserable, through the influence of ill-governed passions. It is not surprising, that such persons are peevish, and querulous, when old. Unjustly they impute to their time of life, that misery with which their vices and follies embitter every age. Whereas, to good men, no period of life is unsupportable, because they draw their chief happiness from sources which are independent of age or time. Wisdom, piety, and virtue, grow not old with our bodies. They suffer no decay from length of days. To them only belongs unalterable and unfading youth. *Those that be planted in the house of the Lord, shall flourish in the courts of our God. They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing.**

You can now, it is true, no longer relish many of those pleasures which once amused you. Your sensations are less quick than formerly; your days more languishing. But if you have quitted the region of pleasure, in return you possess that of tranquillity and repose. If you are strangers to the vivacity of enjoyment, you are free, at the same time, from the pain of violent and often disappointed desire.

* Psalm xcii. 13, 14.

Much fatigue, much vexation, as well as vanity, attend that turbulence of life, in which the younger part of mankind are engaged. Amidst those keen pursuits, and seeming pleasures, for which you envy them, often they feel their own misery, and look forward with a wishful eye to the season of calmness and retreat. For, on all sides of human life, the balance of happiness is adjusted with more equality, than at first appears; and if old age throws some new distresses into the scale, it lightens also the weight of others. Many passions, which formerly disturbed your tranquillity, have now subsided. Many competitions, which long filled your days with disquiet and strife, are now at an end. Many afflictions, which once rent your hearts with violent anguish, are now softened into a tender emotion, on the remembrance of past woe. In the beginnings of life, there was room for much apprehension, concerning what might befall in its progress. Your security was never untroubled. Your hopes were interrupted by many anxieties and fears. Having finished the career of labour and danger, your anxiety ought of course to lessen. Ready to enter into the harbour, you can look back, as from a secure station, upon the perils you have escaped, upon the tempest by which you was tossed, and upon the multitudes who are still engaged in conflicting with the storm.

If you have acted your part with integrity and honour, you are justly entitled to respect, and you will generally receive it. For rarely, or never, is old age contemned, unless when, by vice or folly, it renders itself contemptible. Though length of time may have worn off superficial ornaments, yet what old age loses in grace, it often gains in dignity. The veneration, as was before observed, which grey hairs command, puts it in the power of the aged, to maintain a very important place in human society. They are so far from being insignificant in the world, that families long holden together by their authority, and societies accustomed to be guided by their counsels, have frequently had cause to regret their loss, more than that of the most vigorous and young. To success of every kind, the head which directs, is no less essential than the hand which executes. Vain, nay often dangerous, were youthful enterprise, if not conducted by aged prudence. *I said, Days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom.* — Therefore, thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honour the face of the old man, and fear thy God.†*

Though, in old age, the circle of your pleasures is more contracted than it has formerly been; yet within its limits many of those enjoyments remain, which are most grateful to human nature. Temperate mirth is not extinguished by advanced years. The mild pleasures of domestic life still cheer the heart. The entertainments of conversation, and social intercourse, continue unimpaired. The desire of knowledge is not abated by the frailty of the body; and the leisure of old age affords many opportunities for gratifying that desire. The sphere of your observation and reflection is so much enlarged by long acquaintance with the world, as to supply, within itself, a wide range of improving thought. To recal the various revolutions which

* Job, xxxii. 7.

† Lev. xix. 32.

have occurred since you began to act your part in life; to compare the characters of past and present times; to trace the hand of Providence, in all the incidents of your own lot; to contemplate, with thoughtful eye, the successive new appearances which the world has assumed around you, in government, education, opinions, customs, and modes of living; these are employments no less entertaining than instructive to the mind.

While you are engaged in such employments, you are, perhaps, surrounded with your families, who treat you with attention and respect; you are honoured by your friends; your character is established; you are placed beyond the reach of clamour, and the *strife of tongues*; and, free from distracting cares, you can attend calmly to your eternal interests. For such comforts as these, have you not cause most thankfully to acknowledge the goodness of Heaven? Do they not afford you ground to pass the remainder of your days in resignation and peace; disposing yourselves to rise in due time, like satisfied guests, from the banquet that has been set before you; and to praise and bless, when you depart, the great Master of the feast? *To a man that is good in his sight*, whether he be young or old, *God giveth wisdom, and knowledge, and joy*. For every season of life, the benignity of his providence hath prepared its own satisfactions, while his wisdom hath appointed its peculiar trials. No age is doomed to total infelicity; provided that we attempt not to do violence to Nature, by seeking to extort from one age the pleasures of another; and to gather, in the Winter of life, those flowers which were destined to blossom only in its Summer, or its Spring.

BUT perhaps it will be said, That I have considered old age only in its first stages, and in its most favourable point of light; before the faculties are as yet much impaired, and when disease or affliction has laid no additional load on the burden of years. Let us then view it with all its aggravations of distress. Let us suppose it arrived at its utmost verge, worn out with infirmities, and bowed down by sickness and sorrow. Still there remains this consolation, that it is not long *ere the weary shall be at rest*. Having passed through so many of the toils of life, you may now surely, when your pilgrimage touches on its close, bear, without extreme impatience, the hardships of its concluding stage. From the inestimable promises of the Gospel, and from the gracious presence of God, the afflictions of old age cannot seclude you. Though *your heart should begin to faint, and your flesh to fail*, there is One, who can be *the strength of your heart, and your portion for ever*. *Even to your old age, saith the Lord, I am He; and even to hoary hairs will I carry you. I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you.**—*Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*†

There is undoubtedly a period, when there ought to be a satiety of life, as there is of all other things; and when death shall be viewed, as your merciful dismissal from a long warfare. *To come to the grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in its season* ‡, is the natural termination of the human course. Amidst multiplying

* Isaiah, xlii. 4.

† Jer. xlix. 11.

‡ Job, v. 26.

infirmities, to prolong life beyond its usual bounds, and to draw out your existence here to the last and foulest dregs, ought not to be the wish of any wise man. Is it desirable, to continue lingering on the borders of the grave, after every tie which connects you with life is broken; and to be left a solitary individual, in the midst of a new generation, whose faces you hardly know? The shades of your departed friends rise up before you, and warn you, that it is time to depart. Nature and Providence summon you, to be gathered to your fathers. Reason admonishes you, that, as your predecessors made way for you, it is just that you should yield your place to those who have arisen to succeed you on this busy stage; who, for a while, shall fill it with their actions and their sufferings, their virtues and their crimes; and then shall, in their turn, withdraw, and be joined to the forgotten multitudes of former ages.

Could death, indeed, be considered in no other view than as the close of life, it would afford only a melancholy retreat. The total extinction of being, is a thought, which human nature, in its most distressed circumstances, cannot bear without dejection. But, blessed be God! far other prospects revive the spirits of the aged, who have spent their life in piety and virtue. To them, death is not the extinction, but the renovation of the living principle; its removal from *the earthly house of this tabernacle, to the house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Having fought the good fight; having finished their course, and kept the faith; there is laid up for them the crown of righteousness.* The Saviour of the world hath not only brought immortality to light, but placed it within the reach of their hope and trust. By making atonement for their guilt, he hath prepared their way *within the veil*; and secured to them the possession of *an inheritance, incorruptible and undefiled, reserved in the heavens.*—Such are the hopes and prospects which cheer the sorrows of old age, and surmount the fear of death. Faith and piety are the only adequate supports of human nature in all its great emergencies. After they have guided us through the various trials of life, they uphold us, at last, amidst the ruins of this falling frame; and when the *silver cord is just ready to be loosed, and the golden bowl to be broken; when the pitcher is broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern*; they enable us to say, *O Death! where is thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory?*

SERMON XIII.

ON THE POWER OF CONSCIENCE.

GENESIS, xlii. 21, 22.

And they said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us; and we would not hear: Therefore is this distress come upon us. And Reuben answered them, saying, Spake I not unto you, saying, Do not sin against the child; and ye would not hear? Therefore behold also his blood is required.

THIS book of Genesis displays a more singular and interesting scene, than was ever presented to the world by any other historical record. It carries us back to the beginning of time, and exhibits mankind in their infant and rising state. It shows us human manners in their primitive simplicity, before the arts of refinement had polished the behaviour, or disguised the characters of men; when they gave vent to their passions without dissimulation, and spoke their sentiments without reserve. Few great societies were, as yet, formed on the earth. Men lived in scattered tribes. The transactions of families made the chief materials of history; and they are related in this book, with that beautiful simplicity, which, in the highest degree, both delights the imagination, and affects the heart.

Of all the patriarchal histories, that of Joseph and his brethren is the most remarkable, for the characters of the actors, the instructive nature of the events, and the surprising revolutions of worldly fortune. As far as relates to the Text, and is necessary for explaining it, the story is to the following purpose: — Joseph, the youngest, except one, of the sons of Jacob, was distinguished by his father with such marks of peculiar affection, as excited the envy of his brethren. Having related to them, in the openness of his heart, certain dreams which portended his future advancement above them, their jealousy rose to such a height, that they unaturally conspired his destruction. Seizing the opportunity of his being at a distance from home, they first threw him into a pit, and afterwards sold him for a slave; imposing on their father by a false relation of his death. When they had thus gratified their resentment, they lost all remembrance of their crime. The family of Jacob was rich and powerful; and several years passed away, during which they lived in prosperity; without being touched, as far as appears, with the least remorse for the cruel deed which they had committed.

Meanwhile, Joseph was safely conducted, by the hand of Providence, through a variety of dangers, until, from the lowest condition, he rose at last to be chief favourite of the King of Egypt, the most powerful monarch at that time in the world. While he possessed this high dignity, a general famine distressed all the neighbouring countries. In Egypt alone, by means of his foresight and prudent administration, plenty still reigned. Compelled to have recourse to

that kingdom for supply of food, the brethren of Joseph, upon this occasion, appeared in his presence, and made their humble application to him, for liberty to purchase corn; little suspecting the Governour of the land, before whom they bowed down their faces to the earth, to be him, whom long ago they had sold as a slave to the Ishmaelites. But Joseph no sooner saw, than he knew his brethren; and, at this unexpected meeting, his heart melted within him. Fraternal tenderness arose in all its warmth, and totally effaced from his generous breast the impression of their ancient cruelty. Though, from that moment, he began to prepare for them a surprise of joy; yet he so far constrained himself as to assume an appearance of great severity. By this he intended, both to oblige them to bring into Egypt his youngest and most beloved brother, whose presence he instantly required; and also, to awaken within them a due sense of the crime which they had formerly perpetrated. Accordingly, his behaviour produced the designed effect. For while they were in this situation, strangers in a foreign land, where they had fallen, as they conceived, into extreme distress; where they were thrown into prison by the Governour, and treated with rigour, for which they could assign no cause; the reflection mentioned in the Text arose in their minds. Conscience brought to remembrance their former sins. It recalled, in particular, their long-forgotten cruelty to Joseph; and, without hesitation, they interpreted their present distress to be a judgment, for this crime, inflicted by Heaven. *They said one to another, We are verily guilty concerning our brother, in that we saw the anguish of his soul, when he besought us; and we would not hear: Therefore is this distress come upon us. — Behold also his blood is required.*

From this instructive passage of history, the following observations naturally arise. — I. That a sense of right and wrong in conduct, or of moral good and evil, belongs to human nature. II. That it produces an apprehension of merited punishment, when we have committed evil. III. That although this inward sentiment be stifled during the season of prosperity, yet in adversity it will revive. And, IV. That, when it revives, it determines us to consider every distress which we suffer, from what cause soever it has arisen, as an actual infliction of punishment by Heaven. The consideration of these particulars will lead us to a very serious view of the nature of man, and of the government of God.

I. THERE belongs to human nature a sense of moral good and evil, or a faculty which distinguishes right from wrong, in action and conduct. *They said one to another, We are verily guilty.* — In an age, when the law was not yet given, when no external revelation of the Divine will subsisted, except what had been handed down among the patriarchs, from one generation to another; the brethren of Joseph reasoned concerning their conduct, upon the same moral principles, and were affected by the same feelings, of which we are conscious at this day. Such sentiments are coeval with human nature; for they are the remains of a law which was originally written in our heart. In the darkest regions of the earth, and among the rudest tribes of men, a distinction has ever been made between just

and unjust, between a duty and a crime. Throughout all the intercourse of human beings these distinctions are supposed. They are the foundation of the mutual trust which the transactions of life require; nay, the very entertainments of society constantly appeal to them. The Historian, who studies to magnify his hero, by representing him as just and generous; the Poet, who seeks to interest the world in his fictions, by engaging the heart in behalf of distressed virtue; are sufficient to confute the Sceptic, who denies any natural perception of a distinction in actions.

But though a sense of moral good and evil be deeply impressed on the heart of man, yet it is not of sufficient power to regulate his life. In his present corrupted state, it is both too general to afford him full direction in conduct, and too feeble to withstand the opposition of contrary principles in his nature. It is often perverted by ignorance and superstition; it is too easily overcome by passion and desire. Hence, the importance of that Divine revelation, which communicates both light and strength; which, by the instructive discoveries it makes, and by the powerful assistance it supplies, raises man to a station infinitely superiour to that which he possesses under the mere light of Nature.

It is of consequence, however, to remark, That this revelation necessarily supposes an antecedent sense of right and wrong to take place in the human mind. It addresses itself to men, as possessed of such a faculty; and, when it commands them, in general terms, to pursue *whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, pure, lovely, or of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise*, it plainly appeals to the native dictates of their heart.* Nay, unless men were endowed by nature with some sense of duty or of moral obligation, they could reap no benefit from revelation; they would remain incapable of all religion whatever. For, in vain were a system of duty prescribed to them by the word of God; allegiance were in vain required towards their Creator, or love and gratitude enjoined towards their Redeemer; if, previously, there was no principle in their nature, which made them feel the obligations of duty, of allegiance, and of gratitude. They could have no ideas corresponding to such terms; nor any conviction, that, independently of fear or interest, they were bound to regard, either him who made, or him who redeemed them.—This, therefore, is to be held as a principle fundamental to all religion, That there is in human nature, an approving or condemning sense of conduct; by means of which, *they who have not the law, are a law unto themselves*.* They who, from a mistaken zeal for the honour of Divine revelation, either deny the existence, or vilify the authority of natural religion, are not aware, that by disallowing the sense of obligation, they undermine the foundation on which revelation builds its power of commanding the heart.

The Text leads us to observe, That one of the cases in which the natural sense of good and evil operates most forcibly, is when men have been guilty of injustice or inhumanity. *We saw the anguish of our*

* Rom. i. 14.

brother's soul, when he besought us; and we would not hear. An inward principle prompts us to do good to others; but with much greater authority, it checks and condemns us, when we have done them injuries. This part of the human constitution deserves to be remarked as a signal proof of the wisdom of its Author, and of the gracious provision which he has made for the welfare of mankind. We are all committed, in some measure, to the care and assistance of one another. But our mutual influence reaches much farther with respect to the evils, than with respect to the enjoyments, of those around us. To advance their prosperity, is often beyond our ability; but to inflict injuries, is almost always within our power: And, at the same time, self-interest very frequently tempts us to commit them. With the utmost propriety, therefore, we are so framed, that the influence of the moral principle should be most authoritative, in cases where its aid is most needed; that to promote the happiness of others, should appear to us as praiseworthy, indeed, and generous; but that, to abstain from injuring them, should be felt as matter of the strictest duty. — Amidst the distress which the Patriarchs suffered in Egypt, had only this suggestion occurred, “We saw our brother beginning to prosper, and we contributed not to his advancement,” their minds would have been more easily quieted. But, when their reflection was, *We saw his anguish, when he besought us, and we would not hear,* then compunction turned upon them its sharpest edge. I proceeded to observe,

II. THAT our natural sense of right and wrong, produces an apprehension of merited punishment when we have committed a crime. When it is employed in surveying the behaviour of others, it distinguishes some actions, as laudable and excellent; and disapproves of others, as evil and base. But when it is directed upon our own conduct, it assumes a higher office, and exercises the authority of a judge. It is then properly termed Conscience; and the sentiments which it awakens, upon the perpetration of a crime, are styled, Remorse. *Therefore,* said the brethren of Joseph, *is this distress come upon us; behold also his blood is required.* They acknowledged, not only that they had committed a wrong, but a wrong for which they were justly doomed to suffer.

Did not conscience suggest this natural relation between guilt and punishment, the mere principle of approbation, or disapprobation, with respect to moral conduct, would prove of small efficacy. For disapprobation attends, in some degree, every conviction of impropriety, or folly. When one has acted unsuitably to his interest, or has trespassed against the rules of prudence or decorum, he reflects upon his conduct with pain, and acknowledges that he deserves blame. But the difference between the sense of misconduct, and the sense of guilt, consists in this, that the latter penetrates much deeper into the heart. It makes the criminal feel, that he is not only blamable, but justly punishable, for the part which he has acted. With reference to this office of conscience, the inspired writers frequently speak of it, in terms borrowed from the awful solemnities of judicial procedure; as, *bearing witness for or against us; accusing or excusing, judging and*

condemning. It will be found, that, in the language of most nations, terms of the same import are applied to the operations of conscience; expressing the sense which all mankind have, of its passing sentence upon them, and pronouncing rewards or punishments to be due to their actions.

The sense of punishment merited, you are further to observe, can never be separated from the dread, that, at some time or other, punishment shall be actually inflicted. This dread is not confined to the vengeance of man. For let the sinner's evil deeds be ever so thoroughly concealed from the knowledge of the world, his inward alarms are not quieted by that consideration. Now, punishment is the sanction of a law. Every law supposes a rightful superiour: And therefore, when conscience threatens punishment to secret crimes, it manifestly recognises a supreme Governour, from whom nothing is hidden. The belief of our being accountable to him, is what the most hardened wickedness has never been able to eradicate. It is a belief which arises, not merely from reasoning, but from internal sentiment. Conscience is felt to act as the delegate of an invisible ruler; both anticipating his sentence, and foreboding its execution.

Hence arise the terrors, which so often haunt guilt, and rise in proportion to its atrocity. In the history of all nations, the tyrant and the oppressor, the bloody and the flagitious, have been ever pointed out as fearful, unquiet, and restless; subject to alarms and apprehensions of an unaccountable kind. And surely, to live under such disquietude, from the dread of merited punishment, is already to undergo one of the most severe punishments which human nature can suffer. When the world threatens us with any of its evils, we know the event, and discern the limits of the danger. We see the quarter on which we are exposed to its attack. We measure our own strength with that of our adversary; and can take precautions, either for making resistance, or for contriving escape. But when an awakened conscience places before the sinner the just vengeance of the Almighty, the prospect is confounding, because the danger is boundless. It is a dark unknown which threatens him. The arm that is stretched over him, he can neither see nor resist. On every side he dreads it; and on every object which surrounds him, he looks with terror, because he is conscious that every object can be employed against him as an instrument of wrath. No wonder that the lonesome solitude, or the midnight hour, should strike him with horror. His troubled mind beholds forms, which other men see not; and hears voices, which sound only in the ear of guilt. A hand appears to come forth, and to write upon the wall over against him, as it did of old, in the sight of an impious monarch, *He shall find no ease nor rest. For the Lord shall give him a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And his life shall hang in doubt before him; and he shall fear day and night, and have none assurance of his life. In the morning he shall say, Would to God it were even; and at even he shall say, Would to God it were morning, for the fear of his heart wherewith he shall fear, and for the sight which his eyes shall see.**

* Deut. xxviii. 65, 66, 67.

*His life shall be grievous unto him.** — Adversity! how blunt are all the arrows of thy quiver, in comparison with those of guilt! — But if such be the power of conscience, whence, it may be asked, comes it to pass, that its influence is not more general, either in restraining men from the commission of sin, or in leading them to a timely repentance? This brings me to observe,

III. THAT, during a course of prosperity, the operations of conscience are often suspended; and that adversity is the season which restores them to their proper force. At the time when crimes are committed, the mind is too much heated by passion, and engrossed by the object of its pursuit, to be capable of proper reflection. After this tumult of spirits has subsided, if a train of new passions be at hand to employ its activity, or a succession of pleasurable objects occur to engage its attention, it may for a while remain, though not entirely free from inward misgivings, yet unconscious of the degree of its guilt. Dissipated among the amusements of life, the sinner escapes, in some measure, from his own view. If he reflects upon himself at all, the continuance of prosperity seems to him a strong justification of his conduct. For it will be found, that, in the hearts of all men, there is a natural propensity to judge of the favour of the Supreme Being, from the course of external events. When they are borne with a smooth gale along the stream of life, and behold every thing proceeding according to their wish, hardly can they be brought to believe, that Providence is their enemy. Basking in the sunshine of prosperity, they suppose themselves to enjoy the smile of indulgent Heaven; and fondly conclude, that they are on terms of friendship, with all above, and with all below. Easy they find it, then, to spread over the grossest crimes a covering, thin, indeed, and slight, yet sufficient to conceal them from a superficial view.

Of this we have a very remarkable instance, in those brethren of Joseph, whose history we now consider. Not only from the silence of the inspired writer, we have ground to believe that their remorse was stifled, while their prosperity remained; but we are able to trace some of the pretences, by which, during that period, they quieted their minds. For when they were contriving the destruction of Joseph, we find Judah saying to his brethren, *What profit is it, if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Let us sell him to the Ishmaelites; and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother, and our flesh: and his brethren were content.*† Here you behold them justifying their crime by a sort of pretended humanity; and making light of selling their brother for a slave, because they did not take away his life. How strangely are the opinions of men altered by a change in their condition! How different is this sentiment of the Patriarchs, from that which they afterwards entertained of the same action, when, as you see in the Text, the remembrance of it wrung their hearts with anguish.

But men, in truth, differ as much from themselves, in prosperity and in adversity, as if they were different creatures. In prosperity, every thing tends to flatter and deceive. In adversity, the illusions

* Isaiah, xv. 4.

† Gen. xxxvii. 26, 27.

of life vanish. Its avocations, and its pleasures, no longer afford the sinner that shelter he was wont to find from conscience. Formerly he made a part of the crowd. He now feels himself a solitary individual, left alone with God, and with his own mind. His spirits are not supported, as before, by fallacious views of the favour of Heaven. The candle of the Lord shines not on his head; his pride is humbled; and his affections are softened for receiving every serious impression. In this situation, a man's *iniquity is sure to find him out*. Whatever has been notoriously criminal in his former conduct, rises as a spectre, and places itself before him. The increased sensibility of his mind renders him alive to feelings which lately were faint; and wounds which had been ill healed bleed afresh. When men take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ, they say, *What is the Almighty that we should serve him?* But when they are holden in the cords of affliction, then he showeth them their work, and their transgression, that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ears to discipline; and commandeth, that they return from iniquity.

Hence, we may perceive the great usefulness and propriety of that interchange of conditions, which takes place in human life. By prosperity, God gives scope to our passions, and makes trial of our dispositions. By adversity, he revives the serious principle within. Neither the one, nor the other, could be borne entire and unmixed. Man, always prosperous, would be giddy and insolent; always afflicted, would be sullen and despondent. Hopes and fears, joy and sorrow, are, therefore, so blended in his life as both to give room for worldly pursuits, and to recal, from time to time, the admonitions of conscience. Of the proportion in which they should be mixed for this purpose, we are very incompetent judges. From our ignorance of the degree of discipline which the spiritual state of others requires, we often censure Providence unjustly, for its severity towards them: And, from the vanity and rashness of our wishes, we complain, without reason, of its rigour to ourselves. While we consult nothing but our ease, God attends to our spiritual improvement. When we seek what is pleasing, he sends what is useful. When, by drinking too deep of worldly prosperity, we draw in a secret poison, he mercifully infuses a medicine, at the time that he troubles and embitters the waters. It remains now to observe,

IV. THAT when conscience is thoroughly awakened, it determines the sinner to consider every calamity which he suffers, as a positive infliction of punishment by Heaven. As it had before alarmed him with threatenings of Divine displeasure, it tells him, when he falls under distress, that the threatened day of account is come. Afflictions, on some occasions, rise directly out of our sins. Thus diseases are brought on by intemperance; poverty springs from idleness; and disgrace from presumption. In such cases, the punishment is so closely connected with the crime, that it is impossible to avoid discerning the relation which the one bears to the other. But the appointment of Providence, which we now consider, reaches farther than this. God has framed us so, that distresses, which have no perceivable connexion with our former crimes, are nevertheless interpreted

by conscience, to be inflicted on their account. They force themselves upon our apprehension under this view. They are made to carry, not only that degree of pain which properly belongs to themselves, but that additional torment also, which arises from the belief of their being the vengeance of the Almighty.

Let a man fall unexpectedly into some deep calamity. Let that calamity be brought upon him, either by means which the world calls fortuitous; or by a train of incidents, in which his own misconduct or guilt has apparently had no part; yet one of the first questions which, in such a situation, he puts to himself is, What have I done to deserve this? His reflection is, almost instinctively, drawn back upon his former life; and if, in the course of that retrospect, any flagrant guilty deed occur to smite his conscience, on this he cannot avoid resting with anxiety and terrour, and connecting it in his imagination with what he now suffers. He sees, or thinks that he sees, a Divine arm lifted up; and what, in other circumstances, he would have called a reverse of fortune, he now views as a judgment of Heaven.

When the brethren of Joseph, confined in the Egyptian prison, were bewailing the distress into which they had fallen, there was no circumstance which pointed out any relation between their present misfortune, and their former cruelty to their brother. A long course of years had intervened, during which they flourished in wealth and ease. They were now far from the scene of their crime; in a foreign land, where they believed themselves utterly unknown, and where they had done nothing to offend. But conscience formed a connection between events, which, according to the ordinary apprehension of men, were entirely independent of each other. It made them recollect, that they, who once had been deaf to the supplications of a brother, were now left friendless and forlorn, imploring pity in vain from an unrelenting Governour: and that they who had first conspired to kill their brother, and afterwards sold him for a slave, were themselves deprived of liberty, and threatened with an ignominious death. How undeservedly soever these evils befel them on the part of men, they confessed them to be just on the part of Providence. They concluded the hour of retribution to be arrived; and, in the person of the Governour of Egypt, they beheld the Ruler of the world calling them to account for guilt. *Therefore is this distress come upon us. Behold also his blood is required.*

Similar sentiments on like occasions will be found not uncommon among mankind. Pious men, there is no doubt, are at all times disposed to look up to God, and to acknowledge his hand in every event of life. But what I now observe is, That where no habitual acknowledgment of God takes place; nay, where a daring contempt of his authority has prevailed, conscience, nevertheless, constrains men, in the day of their distress, to recognise God, under the most awful of all characters, The avenger of past guilt.

Herein the wisdom of God appears in such a light, as justly to claim our highest admiration. The ordinary course of his Providence is carried on by human means. He has settled a train of events,

which proceed in a regular succession of causes and effects, without his appearing to interpose, or to act. But these, on proper occasions, are made to affect the human mind in the same manner as if he were beheld descending from his throne, to punish the sinner with his own hand. Were God to suspend the laws of Nature, on occasion of every great crime, that was committed on earth, and to govern the world by frequent interpositions of a miraculous kind, the whole order of human affairs would be unhinged; no plans of action could be formed; and no scope would be given for the probation and trial of men. On the other hand, were the operation of second causes allowed to conceal a Divine hand totally from view, all sense of superiour government would be lost; the world would seem to be void of God; the sinner would perceive nothing but chance and fortune in the distresses which he suffered. Whereas, by its being so ordered, that several incidents of life shall carry the same force, and strike the mind with the same impression, as if they were supernatural interpositions, the fear of God is kept alive among men, and the order of human affairs is, at the same time, preserved unbroken. The sinner sees his distress to be the immediate effect of human violence or oppression; and is obliged, at the same moment, to consider it as a Divine judgment. His conscience gives to an ordinary misfortune all the edge and the sting of a visitation from Heaven.

From the train of thought which the Text has suggested, several inferences naturally follow. But I shall confine myself to two, which claim your particular attention.

The first is, the clear evidence which the preceding observations afford, of a Divine government now exercised over mankind. This most important and awful of all truths cannot be too often presented to our view, or too strongly impressed on our mind. To the imperfect conviction of it, which obtains in the world, must be ascribed, in a great measure, the prevalence of sin. Did men firmly believe that the Almighty Being, who formed them, is carrying on a system of administration which will not leave guilt unpunished, it is impossible that they could remain so inattentive, as we often behold them, to their moral conduct. But the bulk of mankind are giddy and thoughtless. Struck by the superficial appearances of pleasure, which accompany licentiousness, they inquire no farther; and deliver themselves up to their senses, and their passions. Whereas, were they to reflect, but for a moment, upon that view which has now been given of human nature, they might soon be satisfied, that the moral government of God is no matter of doubtful discussion. It is a fact, no less obvious and incontestible, than the government exercised by those earthly rulers whom we behold with the ensigns of their office before our eyes.

To govern, is to require a certain course of action, or to prescribe a law; and to enforce that law, by a suitable distribution of rewards and punishments. Now, God has not only invested conscience, as we have seen, with authority to promulgate, but endowed it also with power to enforce, his law. By placing inward approbation and peace on the side of virtue, he gave it the sanction of reward. But this was

not enough. Pain is a more powerful principle than pleasure. To escape misery, is a stronger motive for action, than to obtain good. God, therefore, so framed human nature, that the painful sense of ill desert should attend the commission of crimes; that this sense of ill desert should necessarily produce the dread of punishment; and that this dread should so operate on the mind, in the time of distress, as to make the sinner conceive Providence to be engaged against him, and to be concerned in inflicting the punishment which he suffers. All these impressions he hath stamped upon the heart with his own hand. He hath made them constituent parts of our frame; on purpose that, by the union of so many strong and pungent sentiments, he might enforce repentance and reformation, and publish to the human race his detestation of sin. Were he to speak to us from the clouds, his voice could not be more decisive. What we discern to be interwoven with the contexture of human nature, and to pervade the whole course of human affairs, carries an evidence not to be resisted. We might, with as much reason, doubt, whether the sun was intended to enlighten the earth, or the rain to fertilize it; as whether he who has framed the human mind, intended to announce righteousness to mankind, as his law.

THE second inference which I make from the foregoing discourse, respects the intimate connexion, which those operations of conscience have, with the peculiar and distinguishing doctrines of the Gospel of Christ. They will be found to accord with them so remarkably, as to furnish an answer to some of those objections, which superficial reasoners are apt to raise against the Christian revelation. In particular, they coincide with that awful view which the Gospel gives us, of the future consequences of guilt. If the sinner is now constrained by conscience, to view the Almighty as pursuing him with evil for long-forgotten crimes, how naturally must he conclude that, in a subsequent period of existence, the Divine administration will proceed upon the same plan, and complete what has been left imperfect here? If, during this life, which is only the time of trial, the displeasure of Providence at sin is displayed by tokens so manifest, what may be apprehended to follow, when justice, which at present only begins to be executed, shall be carried to its consummation? What conscience forebodes, revelation verifies; assuring us that a day is appointed when God will render to every man according to his works; to them, who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, eternal life: But unto them that are contentious, and obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness; indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile. For there is no respect of persons with God. For as many as have sinned without the law, shall also perish without the law; and as many as have sinned in the law, shall be judged by the law.*

While the threatenings of conscience thus strengthen the evidence of the scripture-doctrine concerning future punishments, they likewise pave the way for the belief of what is revealed concerning the method

* Rom. ii. 6—12.

of our deliverance by Christ. They suggest to the sinner some deep and dark malignity contained in guilt, which has drawn upon his head such high displeasure from Heaven. They call forth his most anxious efforts, to avert the effects of that displeasure; and to propitiate his offended Judge. Some atonement, he is conscious, must be made; and the voice of Nature has, in every age, loudly demanded suffering, as the proper atonement for guilt. Hence mankind have constantly fled for refuge to such substitutions as they could devise, to place in the room of the offender; and, as by general consent, victims have every where been slain, and expiatory sacrifices have been offered up on innumerable altars. *Wherewith shall I come before the Lord, and bow myself before the most high God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, and calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, or with ten thousands of rivers of oil? Or, shall I give my first-born for my transgression; the fruit of my body, for the sin of my soul?** These perplexities and agitations of a guilty conscience, may be termed preludes, in some measure, to the Gospel of Christ. They are the pointings of unenlightened nature, towards that method of relief, which the grace of God has provided. Nature felt its inability to extricate itself from the consequences of guilt: The Gospel reveals the plan of Divine interposition and aid. Nature confessed some atonement to be necessary: The Gospel discovers, that the necessary atonement is made. The remedy is no sooner presented, than its suitableness to the disease appears; and the great mystery of redemption, though it reaches, in its full extent, beyond our comprehension, yet, as far as it is revealed, holds a visible congruity with the sentiments of Conscience, and of Nature.

Natural and revealed religion proceed from the same Author; and of course, are analogous and consistent. They are part of the same plan of Providence. They are connected measures of the same system of government. The serious belief of the one, is the best preparation for the reception of the other. Both concur in impressing our mind with a deep sense of one most important truth, which is the result of this whole discourse, That as we *sow now we must reap*; that under the government of God, no one shall be permitted, with impunity, to gratify his criminal passions, and to make light of the great duties of life.

SERMON XIV.

ON THE MIXTURE OF JOY AND FEAR IN RELIGION.

PSALM ii. 11.

Rejoice with trembling.

Joy and fear are two great springs of human action. The mixed condition of this world gives scope for both; and, according as the

* Micah, vi. 6, 7.

one or the other predominates, it influences the general tenour of our conduct. Each of them possesses a proper place in religion. To *serve the Lord with gladness* *, is the exhortation of the Psalmist David. To *serve him with reverence and godly fear* †, is the admonition of the apostle Paul. But under the present imperfection of human nature, each of these principles may be carried to a dangerous extreme. When the whole of religion is placed in joy, it is in hazard of rising into unwarrantable rapture. When it rests altogether on fear, it degenerates into superstitious servility. The Text enjoins a due mixture of both; and inculcates this important maxim, That joy, tempered with fear, is the proper disposition of a good man. In discoursing of this subject, I shall endeavour to shew, first, That joy is essential to religion; and next, That, for various reasons, this joy ought to be mixed with fear; whence we shall be able to ascertain the nature of that steady and composed spirit, which is most suitable to our present condition, and most acceptable to God.

I. Joy is essential to religion, in two respects; as religion inspires joy, and as it requires it. In other words: To rejoice is both the privilege, and the duty, of good men.

In the first place, Religion inspires joy. It affords just ground of gladness to all who firmly believe its doctrines, and sincerely study to obey its laws. For it confers on them the two most material requisites of joy; a favourable situation of things without, and a proper disposition of mind within, to relish that favourable situation.

When they examine their situation without, they behold themselves placed in a world which is full of the influence of a gracious Providence; where beauty and good are every-where predominant; where various comforts are bestowed; and where, if any be withheld, they have reason to believe that they are withheld by parental wisdom. Among the crowd that encompass them, they may be at a loss to discern who are their friends, and who their enemies. But it is sufficient to know, that they are under the protection of an invisible Guardian, whose power can keep them from every evil. All the steps of his conduct they may be unable to trace. Events may befall them, of which they can give no account. But as long as they are satisfied that the system of Divine government is founded on mercy, no present occurrences are able to destroy their peace. *For he who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for them, how shall he not with him freely give them all things?* If their nature is frail, Divine assistance is promised to strengthen it. If their virtue is imperfect, a dispensation is opened, which gives them the hope of pardon. If their external circumstances be in any respect unfavourable, it is because a higher interest is consulted. *All things*, they are assured, *shall work together for their good*. On their prosperity rests the blessing; on their adversity, the sanctifying Spirit of the Almighty. Old age may advance and life decay; but beyond those boundaries of nature, faith opens the prospect of their lasting felicity. Without anxiety, they pass through the different periods of their present existence, because they know it to be no more than an introduction to immortality.

* Psal. c. 2.

† Heb. xii. 28.

As such a situation of things without, lays a solid foundation for joy; so the disposition which religion forms within, promotes the relish of it. It is indeed from within, that the chief sources of enjoyment or trouble rise. The minds of bad men are always disorderly; and hence their lives are so generally uneasy. In vain *they take the timbrel and the harp, and endeavour to rejoice at the sound of the organ.* Spleen and disgust pursue them through all the haunts of amusement. Pride and ill-humour torment them. Oppressed with discontent, their spirits flag; and their worn-out pleasures afford them entertainment no more. But religion subdues those malignant passions, which are the troubles of human repose; which either overcast the mind with the gloom of peevishness, or disquiet it by the violence of agitation. It infuses, in their room, those mild and gentle dispositions, whose natural effect is to smooth the tenour of the soul. Benevolence and candour, moderation and temperance, wherever they reign, produce cheerfulness and serenity. The consciousness of integrity gives ease and freedom to the mind. It enables good men to extract from every object, the whole satisfaction which it is capable of yielding; and adds the flavour of innocence, to all their external pleasures.

In the second place, As religion naturally inspires joy; so what it inspires, it commands us to cherish. As a necessary proof of our sincerity, it requires cheerfulness in the performance of our duty; because, if this be wanting, our religion discovers itself not to be genuine in principle, and in practice it cannot be stable.

Religious obedience, destitute of joy, is not genuine in its principle. For, did either faith or hope, the love of God, or the love of goodness, rule the heart, they could not fail to produce satisfaction in piety and virtue. All those causes of joy which I have mentioned would then operate; and their native effect on the mind would follow. The prospects which religion opens, would gladden, and the affections which it inspires, would sooth the heart. We serve, with pleasure, the benefactor whom we love. We rejoice in every study and pursuit, to which we are sincerely attached. If we serve not God with pleasure, it is because we know him not, or love him not. If we rejoice not in virtue, it is because our affection is alienated from it, and our inclinations are depraved. We give too evident proof, that either we believe not the principles of religion, or that we feel not their power. Exclude joy from religion, and you leave no other motives to it, except compulsion and interest. But are these suitable grounds on which to rest the whole of our obedience to the Supreme Being? *My son, give me thy heart,* is the call of God. Surely if there be no pleasure in fulfilling his commands, the heart is not given him; and, in that case, *the multitude of sacrifices and burnt offerings* is brought to his altar in vain.

As religion, destitute of joy, is imperfect in its principle; so in practice it must be unstable. In vain you endeavour to fix any man to the regular performance of that in which he finds no pleasure. Bind him ever so fast by interest or fear, he will contrive some method of eluding the obligation. Ingenuity is never so fertile of evasions, as

where pleasure is all on the one side, and mere precept on the other. He may study to save appearances. He may dissemble and constrain himself. But his heart revolts in secret; and the weight of inclination will, in the end, draw the practice after it. If perseverance is not to be expected, still less can zeal be looked for from him, who, in his religious duties, trembles without rejoicing. Every attempt towards virtue which he forms, will be feeble and awkward. He applies to it as a task; he dreads the task-master; but he will labour no more than necessity enjoins. To escape from punishment is his sole aim. He bargains for immunity, by every duty which he performs; and all beyond he esteems superfluous toil.—Such religion as this, can neither purify the heart, nor prepare for heavenly bliss. It is the refuge of an abject mind. It may form the ritual of the monk, or prescribe the penance of the idolater; but has no concern with the homage of him, who *worships the Father in spirit, and in truth*. His character is, that the *joy of the Lord is his strength*.^{*} It attaches his heart to religion. It inspires his zeal. It supports his constancy; and accelerates his progress.

There is no man but has some object to which he cleaves for enjoyment; somewhat that flatters him with distant hope, or affords him present pleasure. Joy is the end towards which all rational beings tend. For the sake of it they live: It resembles the air they breathe, which is necessary for the motion of the heart, and all the vital functions. But as the breathing of infected air proves fatal to life; in the same manner joy, drawn from a corrupted source, is destructive, both of virtue and of true happiness. When you have no pleasure in goodness, you may with certainty conclude the reason to be, that your pleasure is all derived from an opposite quarter. You have exhausted your affection upon the world. You have drunk too much of its poisoned waters, to have any relish for a pure spring.

Estimate, therefore, the genuineness of your religious principles; estimate the degree of your stability in religious practice, by the degree of your satisfaction in piety and virtue. Be assured, that where your treasure is, there will your delight be also. The worldly man rejoices in his possessions; the voluptuous in his pleasures; the social in his friends and companions. The truly good man rejoices in *doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with the Lord his God*. He is happy, when employed in the regular discharge of the great duties of life. Spontaneous they flow from the affections of a pure heart. Not only from the keeping of the Divine commandments he expects, but *in the keeping of them*, he enjoys a great reward.—Accordingly, in the sentiments of holy men recorded in Scripture, we find this spirit every-where prevalent. Their language was; *Thy statutes have I taken as mine heritage for ever; for they are the rejoicing of my heart. They are my songs in the house of my pilgrimage. They are sweeter than honey and the honey-comb. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee. They did not receive the spirit of bondage, but the spirit of adoption. They were filled with peace and joy in believing. They rejoiced in hope of the*

* Nehem. viii. 10.

glory of God. As soon as the Æthiopian eunuch received from Philip the light of the Gospel, that light revived and cheered his heart. A new sun seemed to arise; a new glory to shine around him. Every object brightened, *and he went on his way rejoicing.** After the same manner should every good man proceed in his journey through life, with a serene and cheerful spirit. Consternation and dejection let him leave to the slaves of guilt; who have every thing to dread, both from this world and the next. If he appear before others with a dispirited aspect, he dishonours religion; and affords ground for suspicion, that he is either ignorant of its nature, or a stranger to its power.

Thus I have shown joy to be essential to religion. It is the spirit which it inspires, and which it requires in good men. But in our present state, the best principles may be carried to a dangerous excess; and joy, like other things, has its due limits. To serve God with unmixed delight, belongs to more advanced spirits in a happier world. In this region of imperfection, some infusions from a different cup must of necessity tincture our joy. Let us then,

II. TURN to the other side of the argument, and consider the reasons which render it proper, that when we rejoice, we should *rejoice with trembling.*

In the first place, Because all the objects of religion, which afford ground for joy, tend to inspire, at the same time, reverence and fear. We serve a Benefactor, it is true, in whom we have reason to delight; whose purposes are gracious; whose law is the plan of our happiness. But this Benefactor is the King *eternal, immortal, and invisible*; at whose presence the mountains shake, and Nature trembles. *Every good, and every perfect gift, come down from him.* But the hand which confers them, we cannot see. Mysterious obscurity rests upon his essence. He dwelleth in the *secret place of thunder*; and clouds and darkness surround him. He is the *Hearer of prayer*; but we lift our voice to him from afar. Into his immediate presence no access is permitted. Our warmest devotion admits no familiarity with him. *God is in heaven, and thou upon earth; therefore, let thy words be few.* If his omniscience administers comfort in our secret distress, it likewise fills with awe the heart that is conscious of guilt. For, if he *knows our frame, and remembers we are dust; our iniquities, also, are ever before him; our secret sins in the light of his countenance.*

Throughout all his dispensations, greatness, in conjunction with goodness, strikes our view; and wherever we behold the Parent, we behold the Legislator also. The death of Christ, in behalf of a guilty world, is the chief ground of religious hope and joy. But it is no less the ground of reverence; when, in this high transaction, we contemplate God, as at once strict in justice, and great in mercy. *I the Lord keep mercy for thousands of them that fear me. I forgive their iniquity, transgression, and sin; but I will by no means clear the guilty.* When we open the book of the law, we find promises and threatenings mingled in the same page. On the one side, we see Heaven displayed in all its glory: On the other, Hell opening its terrors.

* Acts, viii. 39.

In short, in whatever light we view religion, it appears solemn and venerable. It is a temple full of majesty, to which the worshippers may approach with comfort, in the hope of *obtaining grace, and finding mercy*; but where they cannot enter, without being impressed with awe. If we may be permitted to compare spiritual with natural things, religion resembles not those scenes of natural beauty, where every object smiles. It cannot be likened to the gay landscape, or the flowery field. It resembles more the august and sublime appearances of Nature; the lofty mountain, the expanded ocean, and the starry firmament; at the sight of which the mind is at once overawed and delighted; and, from the union of grandeur with beauty, derives a pleasing, but a serious emotion.

In the second place, As joy, tempered by fear, suits the nature of religion, so it is requisite for the proper regulation of the conduct of man. Let his joy flow from the best and purest source; yet, if it remain long unmixed, it is apt to become dangerous to virtue. As waters which are never stirred, nor troubled, gather a sediment, which putrefies them; so the undisturbed continuance of placid sensations engenders disorders in the human soul. It is wisely ordered in our present state, that joy and fear, hope and grief, should act alternately as checks and balances upon each other, in order to prevent an excess in any of them, which our nature could not bear. If we were subject to no alarms of danger, the wisest would soon become improvident; and the most humble, presumptuous. Man is a pilgrim on earth. Were his path to be always smooth and flowery, he would be tempted to relinquish his guide, and to forget the purpose of his journey. Caution and fear are the shields of happiness. Unguarded joy begets indolence; indolence produces security; security leads to rashness; and rashness ends in ruin. In order to rejoice long, it is necessary that we *rejoice with trembling*. Had our first parents observed this rule, man might have been still in paradise. He who saith in his heart, *My mountain stands strong; I shall never be moved*; may be assured, that his state already begins to totter. Religion, therefore, performs a kind office, in giving us the admonition of the Text. It inspires cheerfulness in the service of God. It proposes joy as our chief spring of action. But it supports joy, by guarding it with fear; not suppressing, but regulating its indulgence; requiring us to rejoice, like persons who have obtained a treasure, which, through want of vigilance, they are exposed to lose. Dependent beings are formed for submission; and to submit, is to stand in awe. *Because the Lord reigneth, let the earth be glad*. We are the subjects of God; and therefore may justly rejoice. But still we are subjects; and, therefore, trembling must mix itself with our joy.

In the third place, The unstable condition of all human things, naturally inspires fear in the midst of joy. The spirit to which religion forms us, must undoubtedly correspond to the state in which we are placed, and to the part which is assigned us to act. Now, the first view under which our present state appears, is that of fallen creatures, who are undergoing, in this world, probation and trial for their recovery; and are commanded to *work out their salvation with*

fear and trembling. This view of our condition infers not habitual dejection of mind. It requires not melancholy abstraction from the affairs, or total contempt of the amusements, of life. But it inspires humility. It enforces dependence on divine aid; and calls forth the voice of supplication to Heaven. In a situation so critical, and where interests so important are at stake, every reasonable person must confess, that seriousness ought to temper rejoicing.

Were there in human life any fixed point of stability and rest, attainable by man; could we, at any one moment, assure ourselves, that there remained no latent source of danger, either to our temporal or our spiritual state; then I admit we might lay trembling aside, and rejoice in full security. But, alas! no such safe station, no such moment of confidence, is allowed to man during his warfare on earth. Vicissitudes of good and evil, of trials and consolations, fill up his life. The best intentioned are sometimes betrayed into crimes; the most prudent overwhelmed with misfortunes. The world is like a wheel incessantly revolving, on which human things alternately rise and fall. What is past of our life has been a chequered scene. On its remaining periods, uncertainty and darkness rest. Futurity is an unknown region, into which no man can look forward without awe, because he cannot tell what forms of danger or trial may meet him there. This we know well, that in every period of our life, the path of happiness shall be found steep and arduous; but swift and easy the descent to ruin. What, with much exertion of care and vigilance, we had built up, one unwary action may, in an evil hour, overthrow. The props of human confidence are, in general, insecure. The sphere of human pleasures is narrow. While we form schemes for strengthening the one, and for enlarging the other, death, meanwhile, advances. Life, with a swift, though insensible course, glides away; and, like a river which undermines its banks, gradually impairs our state. Year after year steals something from us; till the decaying fabric totters of itself, and crumble at length into dust. So that, whether we consider life or death, time or eternity, all things appear to concur in giving to man the admonition of the Text, *Rejoice with trembling.*

I HAVE now shown, in what respects religion both promotes joy, and inspires seriousness. It places us in the most favourable situation, which human life affords, for joy; and it gives us every assistance, for relishing that joy. It renders it our duty to cultivate the satisfaction which it yields. It demands a cheerful spirit, in order to ascertain the sincerity of our principles, and to confirm us in good practice. At the same time the joy which it inspires, is tempered with fear by the genius of religion itself; by the danger to which unguarded joy would expose us; and by the impropriety of indulging it, in a situation so mixed as the present. The *trembling* which is here enjoined, is not to be understood as signifying a pusillanimous dejection. It imports no more than that caution and sobriety, which prudence dictates, as belonging to our state. By connecting such trembling with our joy, religion means to recommend to us a cheerful, but a composed spirit, equally remote from the humiliating de-

pression of fear, and the exulting levity of joy. Always to rejoice, is to be a fool. Always to tremble, is to be a slave. It is a modest cheerfulness, a chastened joy, a manly seriousness, which becomes the servant of God.

But is this, it may perhaps be said, the whole amount of that boasted satisfaction which religion bestows? Is this all the compensation which it makes, for those sacrifices it exacts? Are not the terms which vice holds out far more enticing, when it permits us to gratify every desire; and, in return for our surmounting the timorous scruples of conscience, promises us a life of gaiety, festivity, and unrestrained joy?—Such promises vice may indeed make; but how far it fulfils them, we may safely refer to the determination of the greatest sensualist, when he has finished his career, and looks back on what he has enjoyed. Ask him, Whether he would recommend to his children, and his friends, to hold the same course; and whether, with his dying breath, he dare assure them, that the gratifications of licentiousness afford the greatest enjoyment of life? Whatever hopes vice may at the beginning inspire, yet, after the trial is made, it has been always found that criminal pleasures are the bane of happiness, the poison, not the cordial, of our present state. They are pleasures compensated by an infinite overbalance of pain; moments of delight, succeeded by years of regret; purchased at the expence of injured reputation, broken health, and ruined peace. Even abstracting from their pernicious consequences, they are, for most part, in themselves treacherous pleasures; unsound and disturbed in the moments of enjoyment. *In the midst of such laughter, the heart is sorrowful.* Often is the smile of gaiety assumed, while the heart aches within: And though folly may laugh, guilt will sting. Correcting this pernicious phrenzy of pleasure, and reducing it to a more sober and regulated state, religion is, in truth, no other than wisdom introducing peace and order into the life of man.

While religion condemns such pleasures as are immoral, it is chargeable with no improper austerity, in respect of those which are of an innocent kind. Think not, that by the cautious discipline which it prescribes, it excludes you from all gay enjoyment of life. Within the compass of that sedate spirit, to which it forms you, all that is innocently pleasing will be found to lie. It is a mistake to imagine, that in constant effusions of giddy mirth, or in that flutter of spirits which is invited by a round of diversions, the chief enjoyment of our state consists. Were this the case, the vain and the frivolous would be on better terms for happiness, than the wise, the great, and the good. To arrange the plans of amusement, or to preside in the haunts of jollity, would be more desirable, than to exert the highest effort of mental powers for the benefit of nations. A consequence so absurd, is sufficient to explode the principle from which it flows. To the amusements and lesser joys of the world, religion assigns their proper place. It admits of them, as relaxations from care, as instruments of promoting the union of men, and of enlivening their social intercourse. But though, as long as they are kept within due bounds, it does not censure nor condemn them; neither does it propose them

as rewards to the virtuous; or as the principal objects of their pursuit. To such, it points out nobler ends of action. Their felicity it engages them to seek, in the discharge of an useful, an upright, and honourable part in life; and, as the habitual tenour of their mind, it promotes cheerfulness, and discourages levity.

Between these two there is a wide distinction; and the mind which is most open to levity, is frequently a stranger to cheerfulness. It has been remarked, that transports of intemperate mirth are often no more than flashes from the dark cloud; and that in proportion to the violence of the effulgence, is the succeeding gloom. Levity may be the forced production of folly or vice; cheerfulness is the natural offspring of wisdom and virtue only. The one is an occasional agitation; the other, a permanent habit. The one degrades the character; the other is perfectly consistent with the dignity of reason, and the steady and manly spirit of religion. To aim at a constant succession of high and vivid sensations of pleasure, is an idea of happiness altogether chimerical. Calm and temperate enjoyment is the utmost that is allotted to man. Beyond this, we struggle in vain to raise our state; and, in fact, depress our joys, by endeavouring to heighten them. Instead of those fallacious hopes of perpetual festivity, with which the world would allure us, religion confers upon us a cheerful tranquillity. Instead of dazzling us with meteors of joy, which sparkle and expire, it sheds around us a calm and steady light. By mixing *trembling* with our joy, it renders that joy more solid, more equal, and more lasting.

In this spirit, then, let us serve God, and hold our course through life. Let us approach to the Divine Being, as to a sovereign of whom we stand in awe, and to a father in whom we trust. In our conduct, let us be cautious and humble, as those who have ground to fear; well pleased and cheerful, as those who have cause to rejoice. Let us show the world, that a religious temper, is a temper sedate, not sad; that a religious behaviour, is a behaviour regulated, not stiff and formal. Thus we shall *use the world, as not abusing it*; we shall pass through its various changes, with the least discomposure; and we shall vindicate religion from the reproaches of those who would attribute to it, either enthusiastic joys, or slavish terrors. We shall show, that it is a rational rule of life, worthy of the perfection of God, and suited to the nature and state of man.

SERMON XV.

ON THE MOTIVES TO CONSTANCY IN VIRTUE.

GALAT. vi. 9.

And let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

DISCONTENT is the most general of all the evils which trouble the life of man. It is a disease, which every-where finds materials to feed

itself; for, if real distresses be wanting, it substitutes such as are imaginary in their place. It converts even the good things of the world, when they have been long enjoyed, into occasions of disgust. In the midst of prosperity, it disposes us to complain; and renders tranquillity tiresome, only because it is uniform. There is no wonder that this spirit of restlessness and dissatisfaction, which corrupts every terrestrial enjoyment, should have sometimes penetrated into the region of virtue. Good men are not without their frailties; and the perverseness incident to human nature too readily leads us, who become weary of all other things, to be weary, also, in well-doing.

Let me put a case, which, perhaps, will be found not infrequent in ordinary life. Suppose a person, after much commerce with the world, to be convinced of its vanity. He has seen its most flattering hopes to be fallacious. He has felt its most boasted pleasures to be unsatisfactory. He resolves, therefore, to place his happiness in virtue; and, disregarding all temptations from interest, to adhere to what is right and honourable in conduct. He cultivates acquaintance with religion. He performs, with seriousness, the offices of devotion. He lays down to himself, a rational and useful plan of life; and, with satisfaction, holds on for a while in this reformed course. But, by degrees, discouragements arise. The peace which he hoped to enjoy, is interrupted, either by his own frailties, or by the vices of others. Passions, which had not been thoroughly subdued, struggle for their accustomed gratification. The pleasure which he expected to find in devotion, sometimes fails him; and the injustice of the world often sours and frets him. Friends prove ungrateful; enemies misrepresent, rivals supplant him: And part, at least, of the mortifications which he suffers, he begins to ascribe to virtue.—Is this all the reward of my serving God, and renouncing the pleasures of sin? *Verily, in vain I have cleansed my heart, and washed my hands in innocency. Behold, the ungodly prosper in the world, and have more than heart can wish; while, all the day long, I am plagued and chastened every morning.*—To such persons as these, and to all who are in hazard of being infected with their spirit, I now address myself. In reply to their complaints, I purpose to show, That in no state they can choose on earth, by no plan of conduct they can form, it is possible for them to escape uneasiness and disappointment; that, in a life of virtue, they will suffer less uneasiness, and fewer disappointments, than in a course of vice; they will possess much higher resources and advantages; and they will be assured of complete reward at the end. From these considerations, I hope to make it appear, that there is no sufficient reason for our being weary in well-doing; and that, taking human life upon the whole, Virtue is far the most eligible portion of man.

I. UNEASINESS and disappointment are inseparable, in some degree, from every state on earth. Were it in the power of the world, to render those who attach themselves to it, satisfied and happy, you might then, I admit, have some title to complain, if you found yourselves placed upon worse terms in the service of God. But this is so far from being the case, that among the multitude who devote them-

selves to earthly pleasure, you will not find a single person who has completely attained his aim. Inquire into the condition of the high and the low, of the gay and the serious, of the men of business and the men of pleasure, and you shall behold them all occupied in supplying some want, or in removing some distress. No man is pleased with being precisely what he is. Every-where there is a void; generally, even in the most prosperous life, there is some corner possessed by sorrow. He who is engaged in business, pines for leisure. He who enjoys leisure, languishes for want of employment. In a single state, we envy the comforts of a family. In conjugal life, we are chagrined with domestic cares. In a safe station, we regret the want of objects for enterprise. In an enterprising life, we lament the want of safety. It is the doom of man, that his sky should never be free from all clouds. He is, at present, in an exiled and fallen state. The objects which surround him, are beneath his native dignity. God has tinged them all with vanity, on purpose to make him feel, that this is not his rest; that here he is not in his proper place, nor arrived at his true home.

If, therefore, you aim at a condition which shall be exempted from every disquiet, you pursue a phantom; you increase the vanity and vexation of life, by engaging in a chase so fruitless. If you complain of virtue, because there is incident to it a portion of that uneasiness which is found in every other state, your complaint is most unreasonable. You claim an immunity from evil, which belongs not to the lot of man. Reconcile yourselves, then, to your condition; and, instead of looking for perfect happiness any where on earth, gladly embrace that state which contains the fewest sorrows.

II. **THOUGH** no condition of human life is free from uneasiness, I contend, That the uneasiness belonging to a sinful course, is far greater than what attends a course of well-doing. If you be weary of the labours of virtue, be assured, that the world, whenever you try the exchange, will lay upon you a much heavier load. It is the outside only, of a licentious life, which is gay and smiling. Within it conceals toil, and trouble, and deadly sorrow. For vice poisons human happiness in the spring, by introducing disorder into the heart. Those passions which it seems to indulge, it only feeds with imperfect gratifications; and thereby strengthens them for preying, in the end, on their unhappy victims.

It is a great mistake to imagine, that the pain of self-denial is confined to virtue. He who follows the world, as much as he who follows Christ, must *take up his cross*; and to him, assuredly, it will prove a more oppressive burden. Vice allows all our passions to range uncontrolled; and where each claims to be superiour, it is impossible to gratify all. The predominant desire can only be indulged at the expence of its rival. No mortifications which virtue exacts, are more severe, than those which ambition imposes upon the love of ease, pride upon interest, and covetousness upon vanity. Self-denial, therefore, belongs, in common, to vice and virtue: but with this remarkable difference, that the passions which virtue requires us to mortify, it tends to weaken; whereas those which vice obliges us

to deny, it, at the same time, strengthens. The one diminishes the pain of self-denial, by moderating the demand of passion; the other increases it, by rendering those demands imperious and violent. What distresses, that occur in the calm life of virtue, can be compared to those tortures, which remorse of conscience inflicts on the wicked; to those severe humiliations, arising from guilt combined with misfortunes, which sink them to the dust; to those violent agitations of shame and disappointment, which, sometimes drive them to the most fatal extremities, and make them abhor their existence? How often, in the midst of those disastrous situations, into which their crimes have brought them, have they cursed the seductions of vice; and, with bitter regret, looked back to the day on which they first forsook the path of innocence?

But, perhaps, you imagine, that to such miseries as these, great criminals only are exposed; and that, by a wary and cautious management, it is possible to avoid them. Take vice and virtue, then, in the most general point of view. Compare God and the world as two masters, the one or other of whom you must obey; and consider fairly, in whose service there will be reason for your being weary soonest, and repenting most frequently. The world is both a hard and a capricious master. To submit to a long servitude, in the view of a recompence from which they are excluded in the end, is known to be often the fate of those who are devoted to the world. They sacrifice their present ease to their future prospects. They court the great, and flatter the multitude. They prostitute their conscience, and dishonour their character: And, after all their efforts, how uncertain is their success? Competitors jostle, and outstrip them. The more artful deceive, the more violent overthrow them. Fair prospects once smiled: but clouds soon gather. The sky is darkened; the scene changes; and that fickle world, which, a moment before, had flattered, the next moment forgets them.

God is never mistaken in the character of his servants; for *he seeth their hearts, and judgeth according to the truth*. But the world is often deceived in those who court its favour; and, of course, is unjust in the distribution of its rewards. Flattery gains the ear of power. Fraud supplants innocence; and the pretending and assuming occupy the place of the worthy and the modest. In vain you claim any merit with the world, on account of your good intentions. The world knows them not; regards them not. It judges of you solely by your actions; and, what is worse, by the success of your actions, which often depends not on yourselves. But, in the sight of the Supreme Being, good intentions supply the place of good deeds, which you had not the opportunity of performing. The well-meant endeavours of the poor find the same acceptance with him as the generous actions of the rich. The *widow's mite* is, in his eye, a costly offering; and even he *who giveth to a disciple a cup of cold water*, when he can give him no more, *goeth not without his reward*.

As the world is unjust in its judgments, so it is ungrateful in its requitals. Time speedily effaces the memory of the greatest services;

and when we can repeat them no more, we are neglected and thrown aside. It was the saying of a noted great man of the world, on the fall of his fortunes, "Had I served God as faithfully as I have done my King, he would not have forsaken me in my old age." Unfaithfulness and ingratitude are unknown to God. With him no new favourites arise, to usurp the place, or to bear off the rewards, of his ancient servants. *Even to your old age, I am He; and even to hoary hairs, I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; even I will carry, and will deliver you, saith the Lord Almighty.** — Since, then, in our several departments, we must labour, What comparison is there, between labouring for God, and for the world? How unjust are they, who become weary so much sooner in the service of God, than they do in that of the most severe and imperious of all masters.

III. THE resources of virtue are much greater than those of the world; the compensations which it makes for our distresses, far more valuable. Perpetual success belongs neither to the one, nor the other. But under disappointments, when they occur, virtue bears us up; the world allows us to sink. When the mind of a good man is hurt by misfortunes, religion administers the cordial, and infuses the balm. Whereas the world inflicts wounds, and then leaves them to fester. It brings sorrows, but it provides no consolation. Consolation is entirely the province of religion. Supposing religion to be inferior to vice in external advantages, it must be allowed to possess internal peace in a much higher degree. This is so certain, that almost all men, at some period or other of their life, look forward to it, as to a desirable retreat. When the ends of their present pursuit shall be accomplished, they propose to themselves much satisfaction in an honourable discharge of the duties of their station, amidst those moderate passions, and temperate pleasures, which innocence allows. That which all men agree in holding to be second in importance to the pursuit which they follow, may be safely esteemed to be the first in real worth; and it may be concluded, that if they were not blinded by some prevailing passion, they would discern and adopt it as such.

It is the peculiar effect of virtue, to make a man's chief happiness arise from himself, and his own conduct. A bad man is wholly the creature of the world. He hangs upon its favour, lives by its smiles, and is happy or miserable, in proportion to its success. But to a virtuous man, success in worldly undertakings is but a secondary object. To discharge his own part with integrity and honour, is his chief aim. If he has done properly what was incumbent on him to do, his mind is at rest; to Providence he leaves the event. *His witness is in Heaven, and his record is on high.* Satisfied with the approbation of God, and the testimony of a good conscience, he enjoys himself, and despises the triumphs of guilt. In proportion as such manly principles rule your heart, you will become independent of the world; and will forbear complaining of its discouragements. It is the imperfection of your virtue, which occasions you to be weary in well-doing. It is because your hearts remain divided between God

* Isaiah, xli. 4.

and the world, that you are so often discontented; partly wishing to discharge your duty, and partly seeking your happiness from somewhat that is repugnant to your duty. Study to be more consistent in principle, and more uniform in practice, and your peace will be more unbroken.

Though virtue may appear, at first sight, to contract the bounds of enjoyment, you will find, upon reflection, that, in truth, it enlarges them. If it restrains the excess of some pleasures, it favours and increases others. It precludes you from none, but such as are either fantastic and imaginary, or pernicious and destructive. Whatever is truly valuable in human enjoyment, it allows to a good man, no less than to others. It not only allows him such pleasures, but heightens them, by that grateful relish which a good conscience gives to every pleasure. It not only heightens them, but adds to them, also, the peculiar satisfactions which flow from virtuous sentiments, from devout affections, and religious hopes. On how much worse terms is the sinner placed, in the midst of his boasted gratifications? His portion is confined to this world. His good things are all of one sort only; he has neither knowledge, nor relish, of any thing beyond them. His enjoyment, therefore, rests on a much narrower basis, than that of the servants of God. Enlarge, as much as you please, the circle of worldly gratifications; yet, if nothing of the mind and the heart, nothing of a refined and moral nature, enter into that circle, and vary the enjoyment, languor and weariness soon succeed. Among whom do you hear more peevish expressions of discontent, or more frequent complaints of low spirits, than among the professed votaries of worldly pleasure?

Vice and virtue, in their progress, as in every other respect, hold an opposite course. The beginnings of vice are enticing. The first steps of worldly advancement are flattering and pleasing. But the continuance of success blunts enjoyment, and flattens desire. Whereas the beginnings of virtue are laborious. But, by perseverance, its labours diminish, and its pleasures increase. As it ripens into confirmed habit, it becomes both smoother in practice, and more complete in its reward. In a worldly life, the termination of our hopes always meets our view. We see a boundary before us, beyond which we cannot reach. But the prospects of virtue are growing and endless. *The righteous shall hold on in his way; and he that hath clean hands, shall wax stronger and stronger. The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* This brings me to consider,

IV. THE assured hope which good men enjoy, of a full reward at last. I have endeavoured, by several considerations, to correct your impatience under the present discouragements of virtue. I have shown many high advantages, which it already possesses. But now, laying all these aside; supposing virtue to have brought you no advantage, but to have only engaged you in perpetual struggles with an evil world; the Text suggests what is sufficient to answer every objection, and to silence every complaint; *In due season you shall reap, if you faint not.* It is not a loose encouragement, or a dubious hope,

which is held forth to us. A direct and explicit declaration is made by the Spirit of God, that *holiness and virtue, how discouraged soever, or oppressed, they may be for a while, shall not be frustrated of their reward; but that in due season, when the period which is fixed by the Divine decree shall come, all who have not been weary in well-doing, though they may have sown in tears, shall reap in joy.* As this great principle of faith is so essential to our present argument, and is indeed the foundation of all religion, it will be proper that we now take a view of the grounds on which it rests. By fixing our attention both on the proofs which reason suggests, and on the discoveries which revelation has made, of a state of future retribution, we shall take an effectual method of confirming our adherence to religion, and of baffling those temptations which might lead us to *be weary in well-doing.*

¹⁶ THE first, and most obvious presumption, which reason affords in behalf of future rewards to the righteous, arises from the imperfect distribution of good and evil in our present state. Notwithstanding what I have advanced concerning the pleasures and advantages of virtue, it cannot be denied, that the happiness of good men is often left incomplete. The vicious possess advantages, to which they have no right; while the conscientious suffer for the sake of virtue, and groan under distresses which they have not merited from the world. Indeed, were the distribution of good and evil, in this life, altogether promiscuous; could it be said, with truth, that the moral condition of men had no influence whatever upon their happiness or misery; I admit, that from such a state of things, no presumption would arise of any future retribution being intended. They who delight to aggravate the miseries of life, and the distresses of virtue, do no service to the argument in behalf of Providence. For, if total disorder be found to prevail now, suspicious may, too justly, arise, of its prevailing for ever. If he who rules the universe, entirely neglects virtue here, the probability must be small, of his rewarding it hereafter. But this is far from being the true state of the fact. What human life presents to the view of an impartial observer, is by no means a scene of entire confusion; but a state of order, begun and carried on a certain length. Virtue is so far from being neglected by the Governour of the world, that from many evident marks it appears to be a chief object of his care. In the constitution of human nature, a foundation is laid, for comfort to the righteous, and for internal punishment to the wicked. Throughout the course of Divine government, tendencies towards the happiness of the one, and the misery of the other, constantly appear. They are so conspicuous, as not to have escaped the notice of the rudest nations. Over the whole earth they have diffused the belief, that Providence is propitious to virtue, and averse to guilt. Yet these tendencies are, sometimes, disappointed of their effect, and that which Providence visibly favours, is left, at present, without an adequate reward.

From such an imperfect distribution of happiness, what are we to conclude, but that this system is the beginning, not the whole, of things; the opening only of a more extensive plan, whose consum-

mation reaches into a future world? If God has already *set his throne for judgment*; if he has visibly begun to reward and to punish, in some degree, on earth, he cannot mean to leave the exercise of government incomplete. Having laid the foundation of a great and noble structure, he will, in due time, rear it up to perfection. The unfinished parts of the fabric evidently show, that a future building is intended. All his other works are constructed according to the most full and exact proportion. In the natural world, nothing is deficient, nothing redundant. It is in the moral world only, that we discover irregularity and defect. It falls short of that order and perfection which appear in the rest of the creation. It exhibits not, in its present state, the same features of complete wisdom, justice, or goodness. But can we believe, that, under the government of the Supreme Being, those apparent disorders shall not be rectified at the last? Or, that from his conduct towards his rational creatures, the chief of his works, the sole objection against his perfection shall be allowed to rise, and shall continue unremoved for ever?

On the supposition of future rewards and punishments, a satisfying account can be given of all the disorders which at present take place on earth. Christianity explains their origin, and traces them to their issue. Man, fallen from his primæval felicity, is now undergoing probation and discipline for his final state. Divine justice remains, for a season, concealed; and allows men to act their parts with freedom on this theatre, that their characters may be formed and ascertained. Amidst discouragements and afflictions, the righteous give proof of their fidelity, and acquire the habits of virtue. But, if you suppose the events of this life to have no reference to another, the whole state of man becomes not only inexplicable, but contradictory and inconsistent. The powers of the inferior animals are perfectly suited to their station. They know nothing higher than their present condition. In gratifying their appetites, they fulfil their destiny, and pass away. Man, alone, comes forth to act a part, which carries no meaning, and tends to no end. Endowed with capacities which extend far beyond his present sphere; fitted by his rational nature for running the race of immortality, he is stopped short in the very entrance of his course. He squanders his activity on pursuits, which he discerns to be vain. He languishes for knowledge, which is placed beyond his reach. He thirsts after a happiness, which he is doomed never to enjoy. He sees and laments the disasters of his state; and yet, upon this supposition, can find nothing to remedy them.—Has the eternal God any pleasure in sporting himself with such a scene of misery and folly, as this life, if it had no connexion with another, must exhibit to his eye? Did he call into existence this magnificent universe, adorn it with so much beauty and splendour, and surround it with those glorious luminaries which we behold in the heavens, only that some generations of mortal men might arise to behold these wonders, and then disappear for ever? How unsuitable, in this case, were the habitation to the wretched inhabitant! How inconsistent the commencement of his being, and the mighty preparation of his powers and faculties, with

his despicable end! How contradictory, in fine, were every thing which concerns the state of man, to the wisdom and perfection of his Maker!

Throughout all ages, and among all nations, the persuasion of a future life has prevailed. It sprung not from the refinements of science, or the speculations of philosophy; but from a deeper and stronger root, the natural sentiments of the human heart. Hence it is common to the philosopher and the savage; and is found in the most barbarous, as well as in the most civilized regions. Even the belief of the being of a God, is not more general on the earth, than the belief of immortality. Dark, indeed, and confused, were the notions which men entertained concerning a future state. Yet still, in that state, they looked for retribution, both to the good and the bad; and in the perfection of such pleasures as they knew best and valued most highly, they placed the rewards of the virtuous. So universal a consent seems plainly to indicate an original determination given to the soul by its Creator. It shows this great truth to be native and congenial to man.

When we look into our own breasts, we find various anticipations and presages of future existence. Most of our great and high passions extend beyond the limits of this life. The ambitious and the self-denied, the great, the good, and the wicked, all take interest in what is to happen after they shall have left the earth. That passion for fame, which inspires so much of the activity of mankind, plainly is animated by the persuasion, that consciousness is to survive the dissolution of the body. The virtuous are supported by the hope, the guilty tormented with the dread, of what is to take place after death. As death approaches, the hopes of the one, and the fears of the other, are found to redouble. The soul, when issuing hence, seems more clearly to discern its future abode. All the operations of conscience proceed upon the belief of immortality. The whole moral conduct of men refers to it. All legislators have supposed it. All religions are built upon it. It is so essential to the order of society, that, were it erased, human laws would prove ineffectual restraints from evil, and a deluge of crimes and miseries would overflow the earth. To suppose this universal and powerful belief to be without foundation in truth, is to suppose, that a principle of delusion was interwoven with the nature of man; is to suppose, that his Creator was reduced to the necessity of impressing his heart with a falsehood, in order to make him answer the purposes of his being.

BUT though these arguments be strong, yet all arguments are liable to objection. Perhaps this general belief, of which I have spoken, has been owing to inclination and desire, more than to evidence. Perhaps, in our reasonings on this subject from the divine perfections, we flatter ourselves with being of more consequence, than we truly are, in the system of the universe. Hence the great importance of a discovery proceeding from God himself, which gives full authority to all that reason had suggested, and places this capital truth beyond the reach of suspicion or distrust.

The method which Christianity has taken to convey to us the evidence of a future state, highly deserves our attention. Had the Gospel been addressed, like a system of philosophy, solely to the understanding of men; had it aimed only at enlightening the studious and reflecting, it would have confined itself to abstract truth: it would have simply informed us, that the righteous are hereafter to be rewarded, and sinners to be punished. Such a declaration as that contained in the Text, would have been sufficient: *Be not weary in well-doing, for in due season you shall reap, if you faint not.* But the Gospel has not stopped, at barely announcing life and immortality to mankind. It was calculated for popular edification. It was intended to be the religion not merely of the few, whose understanding was to be informed: but of the many, also, whose imagination was to be impressed, and whose passions were to be awakened, in order to give the truth its due influence over them. Upon this account it not only reveals the certainty of a future state, but, in the person of the great Founder of our religion, exhibits a series of acts relating to it; by means of which, our senses, our imaginations, and passions, all become interested in this great object.

✱ The resurrection of Christ from the grave was designed to be a sensible evidence, that death infers not a final extinction of the living principle. He rose, in order to show, that, in our name, he had conquered death, and was *become the first fruits of them that sleep.* Nor did he only rise from the grave, but, by ascending to heaven in a visible form, before many witnesses, gave an ocular specimen of the transition from this world into the region of the blessed. The employments which now occupy him there, are fully declared. *As our forerunner he hath entered within the veil:—He appears in the presence of God for us. He maketh perpetual intercession for his people. I go, saith he, to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God. In my Father's house are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again, and receive you to myself, that where I am, there you may be also.* The circumstances of his coming again, are distinctly foretold. The sounding of the last trumpet, the resurrection of the dead, the appearance of the Judge, and the solemnity with which he shall discriminate the good from the bad, are all described. The very words in which he shall pronounce the final sentence, are recited in our hearing: *Come, ye blessed of my Father! inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.* Then shall the holy and the just be *caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air.* They shall enter with him into the *city of the living God.* They shall possess the *new earth and new heavens, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes. They shall behold his face in righteousness, and be satisfied with his likeness for ever. — By recording such a train of striking circumstances and facts, the Gospel familiarizes us in some measure with a future state. By accommodating this great discovery, in so useful a manner, to the conceptions of men, it furnishes a strong intrinsic evidence of its divine origin.

Thus, upon the whole, whether you consult your reason, or listen

to the discoveries of revelation, you behold our argument confirmed ; you behold a life of piety and virtue issuing in immortal felicity. Of what worldly pursuit can it be pronounced, that its reward is certain ? Look every where around you, and you shall see, that *the race is far from being always to the swift, or the battle to the strong*. The most diligent, the most wise, the most accomplished, may, after all their labours, be disappointed in the end ; and be left to suffer the regret, of having *spent their strength for nought*. But for the righteous is *laid up the crown of life*. Their final happiness is prepared in the eternal plan of Providence, and secured by the labours and sufferings of the Saviour of the world.

Cease, then, from your unjust complaints against virtue and religion. Leave discontent and peevishness to worldly men. In no period of distress, in no moment of disappointment, allow yourselves to suspect that piety and integrity are fruitless. In every state of being, they lead to happiness. If you enjoy not at present their full rewards, it is because the season of recompence is not yet come. For, *in due season you shall reap*. There is a time which is proper for reward, and there is a period which belongs to trial. How long the one should last, and when the other should arrive, belongs not to you to determine. It is fixed by the wise, though unknown decree of the Almighty. But be assured, that *He that cometh shall come, and will not tarry*. He shall come *in due season*, to restore perfect order among his works ; to bring rest to the weary, comfort to the afflicted, and just retribution to all men. *Behold*, saith the faithful and true Witness, *I come quickly, and my reward is with me*. *To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God*. *I will give him the morning star*. *I will make him a pillar in my temple*. *He shall be clothed in white raiment ; and shall sit down with me on my throne*.*

SERMON XVI.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF ORDER IN CONDUCT



1 COR. xiv. 40.

Let all things be done — in order.

RELIGION, like every regular and well-conducted system, is composed of a variety of parts ; each of which possesses its separate importance, and contributes to the perfection of the whole. Some graces are essential to it ; such as faith and repentance, the love of God, and the love of our neighbour ; which, for that reason, must be often inculcated on men. There are other dispositions and habits, which, though they hold not so high a rank, yet are necessary to the introduction and support of the former ; and therefore, in religious exhortations, these also justly claim a place. Of this nature is that regard to order

* Rev. xxii. 12. ii. 7. 28. iii. 12. 5. 21.

method, and regularity, which the apostle enjoins us in the Text to carry through the whole of life. Whether you consider it as, in itself, a moral duty, or not, yet I hope soon to convince you that it is essential to the proper discharge of almost all duties, and merits, upon that account, a greater degree of attention than is commonly paid to it in a religious view.

If you look abroad into the world, you may be satisfied at the first glance, that a vicious and libertine life is always a life of confusion. Thence it is natural to infer, that order is friendly to religion. As the neglect of it coincides with vice, so the preservation of it must assist virtue.* By the appointment of Providence, it is indispensably requisite to worldly prosperity. Thence arises a presumption, that it is connected also with spiritual improvement. When you behold a man's affairs, through negligence and misconduct, involved in disorder, you naturally conclude that his ruin approaches. You may at the same justly suspect, that the causes which affect his temporal welfare, operate also to the prejudice of his moral interests. The apostle teaches us in this chapter, that *God is not the author of confusion*.* He is a lover of order; and all his works are full of order. But, *where confusion is, there is, its close attendant, every evil work*.† In the sequel of this Discourse I shall point out some of those parts of conduct wherein it is most material to virtue that order take place; and then shall conclude with showing the high advantages which attend it. Allow me to recommend to you, order in the conduct of your affairs; order in the distribution of your time; order in the management of your fortune; order in the regulation of your amusements; order in the arrangement of your society. Thus *let all things be done in order*.

I. MAINTAIN order in the conduct of your worldly affairs. Every man, in every station of life, has some concerns, private, domestic, or public, which require successive attention; he is placed in some sphere of active duty. Let the employments which belong to that sphere be so arranged, that each may keep its place without justling another; and that which regards the world, may not interfere with what is due to God. In proportion to the multiplicity of affairs, the observance of order becomes more indispensable. But scarcely is there any train of life so simple and uniform, but what will suffer through the neglect of it. I speak not now of suffering in point of worldly interest. I call upon you to attend to higher interests; to remember that the orderly conduct of your temporal affairs forms a great part of your duty as Christians.

Many, indeed, can hardly be persuaded of this truth. A strong propensity, has, in every age, appeared among men, to sequester religion from the commerce of the world. Seasons of retreat and devotion they are willing to appropriate to God. But the world they consider as their own province. They carry on a sort of separate interest there. Nay, by the respect which, on particular occasions, they pay to religion, they too often imagine that they have acquired the liberty of acting in worldly matters, according to what plan they

* 1 Cor. xiv. 33.

† James, iii. 16.

choose. How entirely do such persons mistake the design of Christianity! — In this world you are placed by Providence as on a great field of trial. By the necessities of your nature, you are called forth to different employments. By many ties, you are connected with human society. From superiours and inferiours, from neighbours and equals, from friends and enemies, demands arise, and obligations circulate through all the ranks of life. This active scene was contrived by the wisdom of Heaven, on purpose that it might bring into exercise all the virtues of the Christian character; your justice, candour, and veracity, in dealing with one another; your fidelity to every trust, and your conscientious discharge of every office which is committed to you; your affection for your friends; your forgiveness of enemies; your charity to the distressed; your attention to the interests of your family. It is by fulfilling all these obligations, in proper succession, that you show *your conversation to be such as becometh the gospel of Christ*. It is thus you make *your light so to shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven*. It is thus you are rendered *meet for the inheritance of the saints in light*. — But how can those various duties be discharged by persons who are ever in that hurry and perplexity which disorder creates? You wish, perhaps, to perform what your character and station require. But from the confusion in which you have allowed yourselves to be involved, you find it to have become impossible. What was neglected to be done in its proper place, thrusts itself forward at an inconvenient season. A multitude of affairs crowd upon you together. Different obligations distract you; and this distraction is sometimes the cause, sometimes the pretence, of equally neglecting them all, or, at least, of sacrificing the greater to the lesser.

Hence arise so many inconsistent characters, and such frequent instances of partial and divided goodness, as we find in the world; appearances of generosity without justice, honour without truth, probity to men without reverence of God. He who conducts his affairs with method and regularity, meets every duty in its proper place, and assigns it its due rank. But where there is no order in conduct, there can be no uniformity in character. The natural connection and arrangement of duties are lost. If virtue appear at all, it will only be in fits and starts. The authority of conscience may occasionally operate, when our situation affords it room for exertion. But in other circumstances of equal importance, every moral sentiment will be overpowered by the tumultuous bustle of worldly affairs. Fretfulness of temper, too, will generally characterise those who are negligent of order. The hurry in which they live, and the embarrassments with which they are surrounded, keep their spirits in perpetual ferment. Conflicting with difficulties which they are unable to overcome, conscious of their own misconduct, but ashamed to confess it, they are engaged in many a secret struggle; and the uneasiness which they suffer within, recoils in bad humour on all who are around them. Hence the wretched resources to which, at last, they are obliged to fly, in order to quiet their cares. In despair of being able to unravel what they have suffered to become so perplexed, they

sometimes sink into supine indolence, sometimes throw themselves into the arms of intemperance and loose pleasure; by either of which they aggravate their guilt, and accelerate their ruin. To the end that order may be maintained in your affairs, it is necessary,

II. THAT you attend to order in the distribution of your time. Time you ought to consider as a sacred trust committed to you by God, of which you are now the depositaries, and are to render account at the last. That portion of it which he has allotted you, is intended partly for the concerns of this world, partly for those of the next. Let each of these occupy, in the distribution of your time, that space which properly belongs to it. Let not the hours of hospitality and pleasure interfere with the discharge of your necessary affairs; and let not what you call necessary affairs, encroach upon the time which is due to devotion. *To every thing there is a season, and a time for every purpose under the heaven.** If you delay till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day, you overcharge the morrow with a burden which belongs not to it. You load the wheels of time, and prevent it from carrying you along smoothly. He who every morning plans the transactions of the day, and follows out that plan, carries on a thread which will guide him through the labyrinth of the most busy life. The orderly arrangement of his time is like a ray of light which darts itself through all his affairs. But where no plan is laid, where the disposal of time is surrendered merely to the chance of incidents, all things lie huddled together in one chaos, which admits neither of distribution nor review.

The first requisite for introducing order into the management of time, is to be impressed with a just sense of its value. Consider well how much depends upon it, and how fast it flies away. The bulk of men are in nothing more capricious and inconsistent than in their appreciation of time. When they think of it as the measure of their continuance on earth, they highly prize it, and with the greatest anxiety seek to lengthen it out. But when they view it in separate parcels, they appear to hold it in contempt, and squander it with inconsiderate profusion. While they complain that life is short, they are often wishing its different periods at an end. Covetous of every other possession, of time only they are prodigal. They allow every idle man to be master of this property, and make every frivolous occupation welcome that can help them to consume it. Among those who are so careless of time, it is not to be expected that order should be observed in its distribution. But, by this fatal neglect, how many materials of severe and lasting regret are they laying up in store for themselves! The time which they suffer to pass away in the midst of confusion, bitter repentance seeks afterwards in vain to recal. What was omitted to be done at its proper moment, arises to be the torment of some future season. Manhood is disgraced by the consequences of neglected youth. Old age, oppressed by cares that belonged to a former period, labours under a burden not its own. At the close of life, the dying man beholds with anguish that his days are finishing, when his preparation for eternity is hardly commenced.

* Eccles. iii. 1.

Such are the effects of a disorderly waste of time, through not attending to its value. Every thing in the life of such persons is misplaced. Nothing is performed aright, from not being performed in due season.

But he who is orderly in the distribution of his time, takes the proper method of escaping those manifold evils. He is justly said to *redeem the time*. By proper management he prolongs it. He lives much in little space; more in a few years than others do in many. He can live to God and his own soul, and at the same time attend to all the lawful interests of the present world. He looks back on the past, and provides for the future. He catches and arrests the hours as they fly. They are marked down for useful purposes, and their memory remains. Whereas those hours fleet by the man of confusion like a shadow. His days and years are either blanks, of which he has no remembrance, or they are filled up with such a confused and irregular succession of unfinished transactions, that though he remembers he has been busy, yet he can give no account of the business which has employed him. Of him, more than of any other, it may with justice be pronounced, that *he walketh in a vain shew; he is disquieted in vain*.

III. INTRODUCE order into the management of your fortune. Whatever it be, let the administration of it proceed with method and economy. From time to time examine your situation; and proportion your expence to your growing or diminishing revenue. Provide what is necessary, before you indulge in what is superfluous. Study to do justice to all with whom you deal, before you affect the praise of liberality. In a word, fix such a plan of living as you find that your circumstances will fairly admit, and adhere to it invariably against every temptation to improper excess.

No admonition respecting morals is more necessary than this, to the age in which we live; an age manifestly distinguished by a propensity to thoughtless profusion; wherein all the different ranks of men are observed to press with forward vanity on those who are above them; to vie with their superiours in every mode of luxury and ostentation; and to seek no farther argument for justifying extravagance, than the fashion of the times, and the supposed necessity of living like others around them. This turn of mind begets contempt for sober and orderly plans of life. It overthrows all regard to domestic concerns and duties. It pushes men on to hazardous and visionary schemes of gain; and unfortunately unites the two extremes of grasping with rapaciousness, and of squandering with profusion. In the midst of such disorder, no prosperity can be of long continuance. While confusion grows upon men's affairs, and prodigality at the same time wastes their substance, poverty makes its advances like an armed man. They tremble at the view of the approaching evil; but have lost the force of mind to make provision against it. Accustomed to move in a round of society and pleasures disproportioned to their condition, they are unable to break through the enchantments of habit; and with their eyes open sink into the gulph which is before them. Poverty enforces dependence; and dependence increases

corruption. Necessity first betrays them into mean compliances; next, impels them to open crimes; and, beginning with ostentation and extravagance, they end in infamy and guilt. Such are the consequences of neglecting order in our worldly circumstances. Such is the circle in which the profuse and the dissolute daily run.—To what cause, so much as to the want of order, can we attribute those scenes of distress which so frequently excite our pity; families that once were flourishing reduced to ruin; and the melancholy widow and neglected orphan thrown forth, friendless, upon the world? What cause has been more fruitful in engendering those atrocious crimes which fill society with disquiet and terror; in training the gamester to fraud, the robber to violence, and even the assassin to blood?

Be assured, then, that order, frugality, and œconomy, are the necessary supports of every personal and private virtue. How humble soever these qualities may appear to some, they are, nevertheless, the basis on which liberty, independence, and true honour, must rise. He who has the steadiness to arrange his affairs with method and regularity, and to conduct his train of life agreeably to his circumstances, can be master of himself in every situation into which he may be thrown. He is under no necessity to flatter or to lie, to stoop to what is mean, or to commit what is criminal. But he who wants that firmness of mind which the observance of order requires, is held in bondage to the world; he can neither act his part with courage as a man, nor with fidelity as a Christian. From the moment you have allowed yourselves to pass the line of œconomy, and live beyond your fortune, you have entered on the path of danger. Precipices surround you on all sides. Every step which you take may lead to mischiefs, that, as yet, lie hidden; and to crimes that will end in your everlasting perdition.

IV. OBSERVE order in your amusements; that is, allow them no more than their proper place; study to keep them within due bounds; mingle them in a temperate succession with serious duties, and the higher business of life. Human life cannot proceed to advantage without some measure of relaxation and entertainment. We require relief from care. We are not formed for a perpetual stretch of serious thought. By too intense and continued application, our feeble powers would soon be worn out. At the same time, from our propensity to ease and pleasure, amusement proves, among all ranks of men, the most dangerous foe to order. For it tends incessantly to usurp and encroach, to widen its territories, to thrust itself into the place of more important concerns, and thereby to disturb and counteract the natural course of things. One frivolous amusement indulged out of season, will often carry perplexity and confusion through a long succession of affairs.

Amusements, therefore, though they be of an innocent kind, require steady government, to keep them within a due and limited province. But such as are of an irregular and vicious nature, are not to be governed, but to be banished from every orderly society. As soon as a man seeks his happiness from the gaming-table, the midnight revel, and the other haunts of licentiousness, confusion seizes upon him as its own. There will no longer be order in his family;

nor order in his affairs, nor order in his time. The most important concerns of life are abandoned. Even the order of nature is by such persons inverted; night is changed into day, and day into night. Character, honour, and interest itself, are trampled under foot. You may with certainty prognosticate the ruin of these men to be just at hand. Disorder, arisen to its height, has nearly accomplished its work. The spots of death are upon them. Let every one who would escape the pestilential contagion, fly with haste from their company.

V. PRESERVE order in the arrangement of your society; that is, entangle not yourselves in a perpetual and promiscuous crowd; select with prudence and propriety those with whom you choose to associate; let company and retreat succeed each other at measured intervals. There can be no order in his life, who allots not a due share of his time to retirement and reflection. He can neither prudently arrange his temporal affairs, nor properly attend to his spiritual interests. He lives not to himself, but to the world. By continual dissipation, he is rendered giddy and thoughtless. He unavoidably contracts from the world, that spirit of disorder and confusion which is so prevalent in it.

It is not a sufficient preservative against this evil, that the circles of society in which you are engaged are not of a libertine and vicious kind. If they withdraw you from that attention to yourselves, and your domestic concerns, which becomes a good man, they are subversive of order, and inconsistent with duty. What is innocent in itself, degenerates into guilt from being carried to excess; an idle, trifling society is near akin to such as is corrupting: One of the first principles of order is, to learn to be happy at home. It is in domestic retreat that every wise and virtuous man finds his chief satisfaction. It is there he forms the plans which regulate his public conduct. He who knows not how to enjoy himself when alone, can never be long happy abroad. To his vacant mind, company may afford a temporary relief; but when forced to return to himself, he will be so much more oppressed and languid. Whereas, by a due mixture of public and private life, we keep free from the snares of both, and enjoy each to greater advantage.

WHEN we review those different parts of behaviour to which I have shewn that order is essential, it must necessarily occur to you, that they are all mutually connected, and hang upon each other. Throughout your affairs, your time, your expence, your amusements, your society, the principle of order must be equally carried, if you expect to reap any of its happy fruits. For if into any one of those great departments of life you suffer disorder to enter, it will spread through all the rest. In vain, for instance, you purpose to be orderly in the conduct of your affairs, if you be irregular in the distribution of your time. In vain you attempt to regulate your expence, if into your amusements, or your society, disorder has crept. You have admitted a principle of confusion which will defeat all your plans; and perplex and entangle what you sought to arrange. Uniformity is above all things necessary to order. If you desire that

any thing should proceed according to method and rule, let *all things*, as the Text exhorts, *be done in order*.

I must also admonish you, that in small as well as in great affairs, a due regard to order is requisite. I mean not that you ought to look on those minute attentions which are apt to occupy frivolous minds, as connected either with virtue or wisdom. But I exhort you to remember, that disorder, like other immoralities, frequently takes rise from inconsiderable beginnings. They who, in the lesser transactions of life, are totally negligent of rule, will be in hazard of extending that negligence, by degrees, to such affairs and duties as will render them criminal. Remissness grows on all who study not to guard against it; and it is only by frequent exercise, that the habits of order and punctuality can be thoroughly confirmed.

From what has been said, the great importance of this principle to moral and religious conduct must already be evident. Let us, however, conclude with taking a summary view of the advantages which attend it.

First, the observance of order serves to correct that negligence which makes you omit some duties; and that hurry and precipitancy which make you perform others imperfectly. Your attention is thereby directed to its proper objects. You follow the straight path which Providence has pointed out to man; in the course of which all the different business of life presents itself regularly to him on every side. God and man, time and eternity, possess their proper stations, arise in succession to his view, and attract his care. Whereas he who runs on in a disorderly course, speedily involves himself in a labyrinth, where he is surrounded with intricacy and darkness. The crooked paths into which he strikes, turn him aside from the proper line of human pursuit; hide from his sight the objects which he ought chiefly to regard, and bring others under his view, which serve no purpose but to distract and mislead him.

Next, by attending to order, you avoid idleness, that most fruitful source of crimes and evils. Acting upon a plan, meeting every thing in its own place, you constantly find innocent and useful employment for time. You are never at a loss how to dispose of your hours, or to fill up life agreeably. In the course of human action, there are two extremes equally dangerous to virtue; the multiplicity of affairs, and the total want of them. The man of order stands in the middle between these two extremes, and suffers from neither. He is occupied, but not oppressed. Whereas the disorderly, overloading one part of time, and leaving another vacant, are at one period overwhelmed with business, and at another, either idle through want of employment, or indolent through perplexity. Those seasons of indolence and idleness, which recur so often in their life, are their most dangerous moments. The mind, unhappy in its situation, and clinging to every object which can occupy or amuse it, is then aptest to throw itself into the arms of every vice and every folly.

Farther; by the preservation of order, you check inconstancy and levity. Fickle by nature is the human heart. It is fond of change; and perpetually tends to start aside from the straight line of conduct.

Hence arises the propriety of bringing ourselves under subjection to method and rule; which, though at first it may prove constraining; yet by degrees, and from the experience of its happy effects, becomes natural and agreeable. It rectifies those irregularities of temper and manners to which we give the name of caprice; and which are distinguishing characteristics of a disorderly mind. It is the parent of steadiness of conduct. It forms consistency of character. It is the ground of all the confidence we repose in one another. For, the disorderly we know not where to find. In him only can we place any trust who is uniform and regular; who lives by principle, not by humour; who acts upon a plan, and not by desultory notions.

The advantages of order hitherto mentioned belong to rectitude of conduct. Consider also how important it is to your self-enjoyment and felicity. Order is the source of peace; and peace is the highest of all temporal blessings. Order is indeed the only region in which tranquillity dwells. The very mention of confusion imports disturbance and vexation. Is it possible for that man to be happy, who cannot look into the state of his affairs, or the tenour of his conduct, without discerning all to be embroiled; who is either in the midst of remorse for what he has neglected to do, or in the midst of hurry to overtake what he finds, too late, was necessary to have been done? Such as live according to order, may be compared to the celestial bodies, which move in regular courses, and by stated laws; whose influence is beneficent; whose operations are quiet and tranquil. The disorderly resemble those tumultuous elements on earth, which, by sudden and violent irruptions, disturb the course of nature. By mismanagement of affairs, by excess in expence, by irregularity in the indulgence of company and amusement, they are perpetually creating molestation both to themselves and others. They depart from their road to seek pleasure; and instead of it, they every where raise up sorrows. Being always found out of their proper place, they of course interfere and jar with others. The disorders which they raise never fail to spread beyond their own line, and to involve many in confusion and distress; whence they necessarily become the authors of tumult and contention, of discord and enmity. Whereas order is the foundation of union. It allows every man to carry on his own affairs without disturbing his neighbour. It is the golden chain, which holds together the societies of men in friendship and peace.

In fine, the man of order is connected with all the higher powers and principles in the universe. He is the follower of God. He walks with him, and acts upon his plan. His character is formed on the spirit which religion breathes. For religion in general, and the religion of Christ in particular, may be called the great discipline of order. To walk *sinfully*, and to walk *disorderly*, are synonymous terms in Scripture. From such as walk disorderly, we are commanded, *in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, to withdraw ourselves.** The kingdom of Satan is the reign of disorder and darkness. To restore order among the works of God, was the end for which the Son of

* 2 Thess. iii. 6.

God descended to the earth. He requires order to be observed in his church. His undertaking is to be consummated in that perfect order which he shall introduce at the last day. In the *new earth and the new heavens*, undisturbed order shall for ever prevail among the *spirits of the just made perfect*; and whatever farther preparation may be requisite for our being admitted to join their society, it is certain that we shall never share in it, unless we make it now our study to *do all things decently, and in order*.

SERMON XVII.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF THE HEART.

PROVERBS, iv. 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.

AMONG the many wise counsels given by this inspired writer, there is none which deserves greater regard than that contained in the Text. Its importance, however, is too seldom perceived by the generality of men. They are apt to consider the regulation of external conduct as the chief object of religion. If they can act their part with decency, and maintain a fair character, they conceive their duty to be fulfilled. What passes in the mean time within their mind, they suppose to be of no great consequence, either to themselves, or to the world. In opposition to this dangerous plan of morality, the wise man exhorts us to *keep the heart*; that is, to attend not only to our actions, but to our thoughts and desires; and *keep the heart with all diligence*; that is, with sedulous and unremitting care; for which he assigns this reason, that *out of the heart are the issues of life*.—In discoursing on this subject I purpose to consider, separately, the government of the thoughts, of the passions, and of the temper. But before entering on any of these, let us begin with inquiring, in what sense *the issues of life* are said to be *out of the heart*; that we may discern the force of the argument which the Text suggests, to recommend this great duty of *keeping the heart*.

The issues of life are justly said to be out of the heart, because the state of the heart is what determines our moral character, and what forms our chief happiness or misery.

FIRST, It is the state of the heart which determines our moral character. The tenour of our actions will always correspond to the dispositions that prevail within. To dissemble, or to suppress them, is a fruitless attempt. In spite of our efforts, they will perpetually break forth in our behaviour. On whatever side the weight of inclination hangs, it will draw the practice after it. In vain therefore you study to preserve your hands clean, unless you resolve at the same time to keep your heart pure. *Make the tree good, as our Saviour directs, and then its fruits will be good also*. For out of the heart proceed, not only evil thoughts, but murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false

*witness, blasphemies.** If that fountain be once poisoned, you can never expect that salubrious streams will flow from it. Throughout the whole of their course, they will carry the taint of the parent spring.

But it is not merely from its influence on external action that the importance of the heart to our moral character arises. Independent of all action, it is, in truth, the state of the heart itself which forms our character in the sight of God. With our fellow-creatures, actions must ever hold the chief rank; because, by these only we can judge of one another; by these we effect each other's welfare; and therefore to these alone the regulation of human law extends. But in the eye of that Supreme Being, to whom our whole internal frame is uncovered, dispositions hold the place of actions; and it is not so much what we perform, as the motive which moves us to performance, that constitutes us good or evil in his sight. Even among men, the morality of actions is estimated by the principle from which they are judged to proceed; and such as the principle is, such is the man accounted to be. One, for instance, may spend much of his fortune in charitable actions; and yet, if he is believed to be influenced by mere ostentation, he is deemed not charitable, but vain. He may labour unweariedly to serve the public; but if he is prompted by the desire of rising into power, he is held not public-spirited but ambitious; and if he bestows a benefit, purely that he may receive a greater in return, no man would reckon him generous, but selfish and interested. If reason thus clearly teaches us to estimate the value of actions by the dispositions which give them birth, it is an obvious conclusion, that, according to those dispositions, we are all ranked and classed by him who seeth into every heart. The rectification of our principles of action, is the primary object of religious discipline; and, in proportion as this is more or less advanced, we are more or less religious. Accordingly, the regeneration of the heart is every where represented in the Gospel as the most essential requisite in the character of a Christian.

SECONDLY, The state of the heart not only determines our moral character, but forms our principal happiness or misery. External situations of fortune are no farther of consequence, than as they operate on the heart; and their operation there is far from corresponding to the degree of worldly prosperity or adversity. If from any internal cause, a man's peace of mind be disturbed, in vain you load him with all the honours or riches which the world can bestow. They remain without, like things at a distance from him. They reach not the source of enjoyment. Discomposed thoughts, agitated passions, and a ruffled temper, poison every ingredient of pleasure which the world holds out; and overcast every object which presents itself, with a melancholy gloom. In order to acquire a capacity of happiness, must be our first study to rectify such inward disorders. What discipline tends to accomplish this purpose, is of greater importance to man, than the acquisition of the advantages of fortune. These are precarious, and doubtful in their effect; internal tranquillity is a certain good. These are only means; but that is the end.

* Matt. xv. 19.

These are no more than instruments of satisfaction; that is, satisfaction itself.

Justly it is said by the *Wise Man*, that *he who hath no rule over his spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.** All is waste, all is in disorder and ruins within him. He possesses no defence against dangers of any sort. He lies open to every insurrection of ill-humour, and every invasion of distress. Whereas he who is employed in regulating his mind, is making provision against all the accidents of life. He is erecting a fortress, into which, in the day of danger, he can retreat with safety. And hence, amidst those endeavours to secure happiness which incessantly employ the life of man, the careful regulation, or the improvident neglect of the inward frame, forms the chief distinction between wisdom and folly.

Thus it appears with how much propriety the *issues of life* are said to be *out of the heart*. Here rise those great springs of human conduct whence the main currents flow of our virtue, or our vice; of our happiness, or our misery. Besides this powerful argument for *keeping the heart with all diligence*, I must mention another important consideration taken from the present state of human nature. Think what your heart now is, and what must be the consequence of remitting your vigilance in watching over it. With too much justice it is said in Scripture, to be *deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*. Its bias of innate corruption gives it a perpetual tendency downwards into vice and disorder. To direct and impel it upwards, requires a constant effort. Experience may convince you, that almost every desire has a propensity to wander into an improper direction; that every passion tends to excess; and that around your imagination there perpetually crowds a whole swarm of vain and corrupting thoughts. After all the care that can be bestowed by the best men on the regulation of the heart, it frequently baffles their efforts to keep it under proper discipline. Into what universal tumult then must it rise, if no vigilance be employed, and no government be exercised over it? Inattention and remissness are all that the great adversary of mankind desires, in order to gain full advantage. While you sleep, he sows his tares in the field. The house which he finds vacant and unguarded, he presently garnishes with evil spirits.

Add to this, that the human temper is to be considered as a system, the parts of which have a mutual dependence on each other. Introduce disorder into any one part, and you derange the whole. Suffer but one passion to go out of its place, or to acquire an unnatural force, and presently the balance of the soul will be broken; its powers will jar among themselves, and their operations become discordant. — *Keep thy heart, therefore, with all diligence*; for all thy diligence is here required. And though thine own keeping alone will not avail, unless the assistance of a higher power concur, yet of this be well assured, that no aid from heaven is to be expected, if thou shalt neglect to exert thyself in performing the part assigned thee.

HAVING now shown the importance of exercising government over the heart, I proceed to consider more particularly in what the

* Prov. xxv. 28.

government consists, as it respects the thoughts, the passions, and the temper.

I begin with the thoughts, which are the prime movers of the whole human conduct. All that makes a figure on the great theatre of the world, the employments of the busy, the enterprises of the ambitious, and the exploits of the warlike, the virtues which form the happiness, and the crimes which occasion the misery of mankind, originate in that silent and secret recess of thought which is hidden from every human eye. The secrecy and silence which reign there, favour the prejudice, entertained by too many, that thought is exempted from all control. Passions, they perhaps admit, require government and restraint, because they are violent emotions, and disturb society. But with their thoughts, they plead, no one is concerned. By these, as long as they remain in their bosom, no offence can be given, and no injury committed. To enjoy unrestrained the full range of imagination, appears to them the native right and privilege of man.

Had they to do with none but their fellow-creatures, such reasoning might be specious. But they ought to remember, that in the sight of the Supreme Being, thoughts bear the character of good or evil as much as actions; and that they are, in especial manner, the subjects of Divine jurisdiction, because they are cognizable at no other tribunal. The moral regulation of our thoughts, is the particular test of our reverence for God. If we restrain our passions from breaking forth into open disorders, while we abandon our imagination in secret to corruption, we show that virtue rests with us upon regard to men; and that however we may act a part in public with propriety, there is before our eyes no fear of that God who *searcheth the heart*; and *requireth truth in the inward parts*.

But, even abstracting from this awful consideration, the government of our thoughts must appear to be of high consequence, from their direct influence on conduct. It is plain, that thought gives the first impulse to every principle of action. Actions are, in truth, no other than thoughts ripened into consistency and substance. So certain is this, that to judge with precision of the character of any man, and to foretel with confidence what part he will act, no more were requisite, than to be rendered capable of viewing the current of thought which passes most frequently within him. Though by such a method we have no access to judge of one another, yet thus it is always in our power to judge of ourselves. Each of us, by impartially scrutinizing his indulged and favourite thoughts, may discover the whole secret of his real character. This consideration alone is sufficient to show of what importance the government of thought is to the *keeping of the heart*.

Proposing us convinced of its importance, a question may arise, how far it is within our power, and in what degree thoughts are subject to the command of the will? It is plain that they are not always the offspring of choice. Often they are inevitably impressed upon the mind by surrounding objects. Often they start up, as of themselves, without any principle of introduction which we are able

to trace. *As the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou canst not tell whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth*, equally rapid in its transitions, and inscrutable in its progress, is the course of thought. Moving along a train of conceptions which are too delicate for our observation, it defies all endeavours either to explore or to stop its path. Hence vain and fantastic imaginations sometimes break in upon the most settled attention, and disturb even the devout exercises of pious minds. Instances of this sort must be placed to the account of human frailty. They are misfortunes to be deplored, rather than crimes to be condemned; and our gracious Creator, who *knows our frame, and remembers we are dust*, will not be severe in marking every such error, and wandering of the mind. But, after these allowances are made, still there remains much scope for the proper government of thought; and a multitude of cases occur, in which we are no less accountable for what we think than for what we do.

As, first, when the introduction of any train of thought depends upon ourselves, and is our voluntary act; by turning our attention towards such objects, awakening such passions, or engaging in such employments, as we know must give a peculiar determination to our thoughts. Next, when thoughts, by whatever accident they may have been originally suggested, are indulged with deliberation and complacency. Though the mind has been passive in their reception, and therefore free from blame; yet, if it be active in their continuance, the guilt becomes its own. They may have intruded at first, like unbidden guests; but if, when entered, they are made welcome, and kindly entertained, the case is the same as if they had been invited from the beginning. If we be thus accountable to God for thoughts either voluntarily introduced, or deliberately indulged, we are no less so, in the last place, for those which find admittance into our hearts from supine negligence, from total relaxation of attention, from allowing our imagination to rove with entire licence, *like the eyes of the fool, towards the ends of the earth*. Our minds are, in this case, thrown open to folly and vanity. They are prostituted to every evil thing which pleases to take possession. The consequences must all be charged to our account; and in vain we plead excuse from human infirmity. Hence it appears, that the great object at which we are to aim in governing our thoughts, is, to take the most effectual measures for preventing the introduction of such as are sinful, and for hastening their expulsion, if they shall have introduced themselves without consent of the will.

But when we descend into our breasts, and examine how far we have studied to keep this object in view, who can tell *how oft he hath offended*? In no article of religion or morals are men more culpably remiss, than in the unrestrained indulgence they give to fancy, and that too, for most part, without remorse. Since the time that Reason began to exert her powers, Thought, during our waking hours, has been active in every breast, without a moment's suspension or pause. The current of ideas has been always flowing. The wheels of the spiritual engine have circulated with perpetual motion. Let me ask, what has been the fruit of this incessant activity with the

greatest part of mankind? Of the innumerable hours that have been employed in thought, how few are marked with any permanent or useful effect! How many have either passed away in idle dreams; or have been abandoned to anxious discontented musings, to unsocial and malignant passions, or to irregular and criminal desires! Had I power to lay open that storehouse of iniquity, which the hearts of too many conceal; could I draw out and read to them a list of all the imaginations they have devised, and all the passions they have indulged in secret; what a picture of men would I present to themselves! What crimes would they appear to have perpetrated in fancy, which to their most intimate companions they durst not reveal!

Even when men imagine their thoughts to be innocently employed, they too commonly suffer them to run out into extravagant imaginations, and chimerical plans of what they could wish to attain, or choose to be, if they could frame the course of things according to their desire. Though such employments of fancy come not under the same description with those which are plainly criminal, yet wholly unblameable they seldom are. Besides the waste of time which they occasion, and the misapplication which they indicate of those intellectual powers that were given to us for much nobler purposes, such romantic speculations lead us always into the neighbourhood of forbidden regions. They place us on dangerous ground. They are for the most part connected with some one bad passion; and they always nourish a giddy and frivolous turn of thought. They unfit the mind for applying with vigour to rational pursuits, or for acquiescing in sober plans of conduct. From that ideal world in which it allows itself to dwell, it returns, to the commerce of men, unbenumbed and relaxed, sickly and tainted, averse from discharging the duties, and sometimes disqualified even for relishing the pleasures of ordinary life. *O Jerusalem! wash thine heart from wickedness. How long shall thy vain thoughts lodge within thee?** — In order to guard against all such corruption and abuses of thought as I have mentioned, it may be profitable to attend to the following rules:

In the first place, Study to acquire the habit of attention to thought. No study is more important, for in proportion to the degree in which this habit is possessed, such commonly is the degree of intellectual improvement. It is the power of attention which in a great measure distinguishes the wise and the great from the vulgar and trifling herd of men. The latter are accustomed to think, or rather to dream, without knowing the subject of their thoughts. In their unconnected roving, they pursue no end; they follow no track. Every thing floats loose and disjointed on the surface of their mind; like leaves scattered and blown about on the face of the waters.

In order to lead your thoughts into any useful direction, your first care must be, to acquire the power of fixing them, and of restraining their irregular motions. Inure yourselves to form a plan of proper meditation; to pursue it steadily; and with severe authority to keep the door shut against intrusions of wandering fancy.

* Jer. iv. 14.

Let your mind, for this purpose, become a frequent object to itself. Let your thoughts be made the subject of thought and review. — “To what is my attention at present directed? Could I disclose it without a blush, to the world? Were God instantly to call me into judgment, what account could I give of it to him? Shall I be the wiser or the better for dwelling on such thoughts as now fill my mind? Are they entirely consistent with my innocence, and with my present and future peace? If they are not, to what purpose do I indulge such unprofitable or dangerous musings?” — By frequent exercise of this inward scrutiny, we might gradually bring imagination under discipline, and turn the powers of thought to their proper use as means of improvement, instead of suffering them to be only the instruments of vanity and guilt.

IN the second place, In order to the government of thought, it is necessary to guard against idleness. Idleness is the great fomentor of all corruptions in the human heart. In particular, it is the parent of loose imaginations and inordinate desires. The ever active and restless power of thought, if not employed about what is good, will naturally and unavoidably engender evil. Imagine not that mere occupation, of whatever kind it be, will exempt you from the blame and danger of an idle life. Perhaps the worst species of idleness is a dissipated, though seemingly busy life, spent in the haunts of loose society, and in the chase of perpetual amusement. Hence a giddy mind, alternately elated and dejected with trifles, occupied with no recollection of the past but what is fruitless, and with no plans for the future but what are either frivolous or guilty.

As, therefore, you would govern your thoughts, or indeed as you would have any thoughts that are worthy of being governed, provide honourable employment for the native activity of your minds. Keep knowledge, virtue, and usefulness, ever in view. Let your life proceed in a train of such pursuits as are worthy of a Christian, of a rational and social being. While these are regularly carried on as the main business of life, let amusement possess no more than its proper place in the distribution of your time. Take particular care that your amusements be of an irreproachable kind, and that all your society be either improving or innocent. So shall the stream of your thoughts be made to run in a pure channel. Manly occupations and virtuous principles will expel the taint, which idleness never fails to communicate to the vacant mind.

IN the third place, When criminal thoughts arise, attend to all the proper methods of speedily suppressing them. Take example from the unhappy industry which sinners discover in banishing good ones, when a natural sense of religion forces them on their conscience. How anxiously do they fly from themselves! How studiously do they drown the voice which upbraids them in the noise of company or diversion! What numerous artifices do they employ to evade the uneasiness which returns of reflection would produce! — Were we to use equal diligence in preventing the entrance of vicious suggestions, or in expelling them when entered, why should we not be equally successful in a much better cause? As soon as you are sensible that

any dangerous passion begins to ferment, instantly call in other passions, and other ideas, to your aid. Hasten to turn your thoughts in a different direction. Summon up whatever you have found to be the power for composing and harmonizing your mind. Fly for assistance to serious studies, to prayer, and devotion; or even fly to business, or innocent society, if solitude be in hazard of favouring the seduction. By such means you may stop the progress of the growing evil. You may apply an antidote, before the poison has had time to work its full effect.

IN the fourth place, It will be particularly useful to impress your minds with an habitual sense of the presence of the Almighty. When we reflect what a strong check the belief of divine omniscience is calculated to give to all criminal thoughts, we are tempted to suspect, that even by Christians this article of faith is not received with sincere conviction. For who but must confess, that if he knew a parent, a friend, or a neighbour, to have the power of looking into his heart, he durst not allow himself that unbounded scope which he now gives to his imagination and desire? Whence, then, comes it to pass, that men, without fear or concern, bring into the presence of the awful Majesty of Heaven, that folly and licentiousness of thought which would make them blush and tremble, if one of their own fellow-creatures could descry it? At the same time, no principle is supported by clearer evidence, than the omniscience of God. All religious sects have admitted it, all societies of men, in their oaths and covenants, appeal to it. The Sovereign of the universe cannot but know what passes throughout his dominions. He who supports all nature, must needs pervade and fill it. He who formed the heart, is certainly conscious to what passes within it.

Never let this great article of faith escape from your view. In thinking, as well as in acting, accustom yourselves to look up with reverence to that piercing eye of divine observation, which *never stumbers nor sleeps*. Behold a pen always writing over your head, and making up that great record of your thoughts, words, and actions, from which at last you are to be judged. Think that you are never less alone, than when by yourselves; for then is he still with you, whose inspection is of greater consequence than that of all mankind. Let these awful considerations not only check the dissipation of corrupt fancy, but infuse into your spirits that solemn composure which is the parent of meditation and wisdom. Let them not only expel what is evil, but introduce in its stead what is pure and holy; elevating your thoughts to divine and eternal objects, and acting as the counterpoise to those attractions of the world, which would draw your whole attention downwards to sense and vanity.

SERMON XVIII.

THE SAME SUBJECT CONTINUED.

PROVERBS, iv, 23.

Keep thy heart with all diligence; for, out of it are the issues of life.

HAVING treated, in the foregoing Discourse, of the government of the thoughts, I proceed to consider the government of the passions, as the next great duty included in the *keeping of the heart*.

Passions are strong emotions of the mind, occasioned by the view of apprehending good or evil. They are original parts of the constitution of our nature; and therefore to extirpate them is a mistaken aim. Religion requires no more of us, than to moderate and rule them. When our blessed Lord assumed the nature, without the corruption, of man, he was subject to like passions with us. On some occasions, he felt the risings of anger. He was often touched with pity. He was *grieved in spirit*; he sorrowed, and he wept.

Passions, when properly directed, may be subservient to very useful ends. They rouse the dormant powers of the soul. They are even found to exalt them. They often raise a man above himself, and render him more penetrating, vigorous, and masterly, than he is in his calmer hours. Actuated by some high passion, he conceives great designs, and surmounts all difficulties in the execution. He is inspired with more lofty sentiments, and endowed with more persuasive utterance, than he possesses at any other time. Passions are the active forces of the soul. They are its highest powers brought into movement and exertion. But, like all other great powers, they are either useful or destructive, according to their direction and degree; as wind and fire are instrumental in carrying on many of the beneficent operations of nature; but when they rise to undue violence, or deviate from their proper course, their path is marked with ruin.

It is the present infelicity of human nature, that those strong emotions of the mind are become too powerful for the principle which ought to regulate them. This is one of the unhappy consequences of our apostasy from God, that the influence of reason is weakened, and that of passion strengthened within the heart. When man revolted from his Maker, his passions rebelled against himself; and, from being originally the ministers of reason, have become the tyrants of the soul. Hence, in treating of this subject, two things may be assumed as principles: first, that through the present weakness of the understanding, our passions are often directed towards improper objects; and next, that even when their direction is just, and their objects are innocent, they perpetually tend to run into excess; they always hurry us towards their gratification with a blind and dangerous impetuosity. On these two points, then, turns the whole government of our passions: first, to ascertain the proper objects of their pursuit; and next, to restrain them in that pursuit, when they would carry us beyond the bounds of reason. If there be any pas-

sion which intrudes itself unseasonably into our mind, which darkens and troubles our judgment, or habitually discomposes our temper; which unfits us for properly discharging the duties, or disqualifies us for cheerfully enjoying the comforts of life, we may certainly conclude it to have gained a dangerous ascendant. The great object which we ought to propose to ourselves is, to acquire a firm and steadfast mind, which the infatuation of passion shall not seduce, nor its violence shake; which, resting on fixed principles, shall, in the midst of contending emotions, remain free and master of itself; able to listen calmly to the voice of conscience, and prepared to obey its dictates without hesitation.

To obtain, if possible, such command of passion, is one of the highest attainments of the rational nature. Arguments to show its importance crowd upon us from every quarter. If there be any fertile source of mischief to human life, it is, beyond doubt, the misrule of passion. It is this which poisons the enjoyment of individuals, overturns the order of society, and strews the path of life with so many miseries, as to render it indeed the valley of tears. All those great scenes of public calamity, which we behold with astonishment and horror, have originated from the source of violent passions. These have overspread the earth with bloodshed. These have pointed the assassin's dagger, and filled the poisoned bowl. These, in every age, have furnished too copious materials for the orator's pathetic declamation, and for the poet's tragical song.

When from public life we descend to private conduct, though passion operate not there in such a wide and destructive sphere, we shall find its influence to be no less baneful. I need not mention the black and fierce passions, such as envy, jealousy, and revenge, whose effects are obviously noxious, and whose agitations are immediate misery. But take any of the licentious and sensual kind. Suppose it to have unlimited scope; trace it throughout its course; and you will find that gradually, as it rises, it taints the soundness, and troubles the peace, of his mind over whom it reigns; that in its progress, it engages him in pursuits which are marked either with danger or with shame; that in the end, it wastes his fortune, destroys his health, or debases his character; and aggravates all the miseries in which it has involved him, with the concluding pangs of bitter remorse. Through all the stages of this fatal course, how many have heretofore run! What multitudes do we daily behold pursuing it with blind and headlong steps!

But, on the evils which flow from unrestrained passions, it is needless to enlarge. Hardly are there any so ignorant or inconsiderate as not to admit, that where passion is allowed to reign, both happiness and virtue must be impaired. I proceed therefore to what is of more consequence, to suggest some directions which may be useful in assisting us to preserve the government of our passions.

In the first place, We must study to acquire just views of the comparative importance of those objects that are most ready to attract desire. The erroneous opinions which we form concerning happiness and misery, give rise to all the mistaken and dangerous passions which

embroil our life. We suffer ourselves to be dazzled by unreal appearances of pleasure. We follow, with precipitancy, whithersoever the crowd leads. We admire, without examination, what our predecessors have admired. We fly from every shadow at which we see others tremble. Thus, agitated by vain fears and deceitful hopes, we are hurried into eager contests about objects which are in themselves of no value. By rectifying our opinions, we should strike at the root of the evil. If our vain imaginations were chastened, the tumult of our passions would subside.

It is observed, that the young and the ignorant are always the most violent in pursuit. The knowledge which is forced upon them by longer acquaintance with the world, moderates their impetuosity. Study then, to anticipate, by reflection, that knowledge which experience often purchases at too dear a price. Inure yourselves to frequent consideration of the emptiness of those pleasures which excite so much strife and commotion among mankind. Think how much more of true enjoyment is lost by the violence of passion, than by the want of the things which give occasion to that passion. Persuade yourselves, that the favour of God and the possession of virtue form the chief happiness of the rational nature. Let a contented mind, and a peaceful life, hold the next place in your estimation. These are the conclusions which the wise and thinking part of mankind have always formed. To these conclusions, after having run the race of passion, you will probably come at the last. By forming them betimes, you would make a seasonable escape from that tempestuous region; through which none can pass without suffering misery, contracting guilt, and undergoing severe remorse.

IN the second place, In order to attain the command of passion, it is requisite to acquire the power of self-denial. The self-denial of a Christian consists not in perpetual austerity of life, and universal renunciation of the innocent comforts of the world. Religion requires no such unnecessary sacrifices, nor is any such foe to present enjoyment. It consists in our being ready, on proper occasions, to abstain from pleasure, or to submit to suffering, for the sake of duty and conscience, or from a view to some higher or more extensive good. If we possess not this power, we shall be the prey of every loose inclination that chances to arise. Pampered by continual indulgence, all our passions will become mutinous and headstrong. Desire, not reason, will be the ruling principle of our conduct.

As, therefore, you would keep your passions within due bounds, you must, betimes accustom them to know the reins. You must not wait till some critical occasion for the exercise of self-denial occur. In vain you will attempt to act with authority, if your first essay be made when temptation has inflamed the mind. In cooler hours, you must sometimes abridge your enjoyment even of what is innocent. In the midst of lawful pleasure, you must maintain moderation, abstemiousness, and self-command. The observance of this discipline is the only method of supporting reason in its proper ascendant. For if you allow yourselves always to stretch to the utmost point of inno-

cence and safety, beyond that point you will infallibly be hurried, when passion shall arise in its might to shake the heart.

In the third place, Impress your minds deeply with this persuasion, that nothing is what it appears to be when you are under the power of passion. Be assured, that no judgment which you then form, can be in the least depended upon as sound or true. The fumes which arise from a heart boiling with violent passions, never fail to darken and trouble the understanding. When the gourd withered, under the shade of which the prophet Jonah reposed, his mind, already ruffled by the disappointment of his predictions, lost, on occasion of this slight incident, all command of itself; and, in the midst of his impatience, he *wished to die, rather than to live*. Instead of being calmed by that expostulating voice, *Dost thou well, O Jonah, to be angry because of the gourd?* he replied with great emotion, *I do well to be angry unto death*. But did Jonah think so when his passion had abated? Do these sentiments bear the least resemblance to that humble and devout prayer, which, on another occasion, when in his calm mind, he put up to God? * No two persons can differ more from each other, than the same person differs from himself, when agitated by passion, and when master of his reason. *I do well to be angry*, is the language of every man when his mind is inflamed. Every passion justifies itself. It brings in a thousand pretences to its aid. It borrows many a false colour, to hide its deformity. It possesses a sort of magic, by which it can magnify or diminish objects at pleasure, and transform the appearance of every thing within its sphere.

Let the knowledge of this imposture which passion practises, place you continually on your guard. Let the remembrance of it be ever at hand, to check the extravagant judgments which you are apt to pass in those moments of delusion. Listen to no suggestion which then arises. Form no conclusions on which you are to act. Assure yourselves that every thing is beheld through a false medium. Have patience for a little, and the illusion will vanish; the atmosphere will clear up around you, and objects return to be viewed in their native colours and just dimensions.

In the fourth place, Oppose early the beginnings of passion. Avoid particularly all such objects as are apt to excite passions which you know to predominate within you. As soon as you find the tempest rising, have recourse to every proper method, either of allaying its violence, or of escaping to a calmer shore. Hasten to call up emotions of an opposite nature. Study to conquer one passion, by means of some other which is of less dangerous tendency. Never account any thing small or trivial, which is in hazard of introducing disorder into your heart. Never make light of any desire which you feel gaining such progress as to threaten entire dominion. Blandishing it will appear at the first. As a gentle and innocent emotion, it may steal into the heart; but as it advances, it is likely to *pierce you through with many sorrows*. What you indulged as a favourite amusement, will shortly become a serious business; and in the end may prove the burden of your life. Most of our passions flatter us in their rise.

* See Jonah, ii.

But, their beginnings are treacherous; their growth is imperceptible; and the evils which they carry in their train lie concealed, until their dominion is established. What Solomon says of one of them, holds true of them all, that their *beginning is as when one letteth out water.** It issues from a small chink, which once might have been easily stopped; but, being neglected, it is soon widened by the stream, till the bank is at last totally thrown down, and the flood is at liberty to deluge the whole plain.

IN the fifth place, The excess of every passion will be moderated by frequent meditation on the vanity of the world, the short continuance of life, the approach of death, judgment, and eternity. The imaginary degree of importance which the neglect of such meditation suffers us to bestow on temporal things, is one great cause of our vehemence in desire, and our eagerness in pursuit. We attach ourselves to the objects around us, as if we could enjoy them for ever. Higher and more enlarged prospects of the destination of man, would naturally cool his misplaced ardour. For what can appear so considerable in human affairs, as to discompose or agitate the mind of him to whose view eternity lies open, and all the greatness of the universe of God? How contemptible will seem to him this hurry of spirits, this turmoil of passion, about things which are so soon to end? — Where are they who once disturbed the world with the violence of their contests, and filled it with the renown of their exploits? What now remains of their designs and enterprises, of their passions and pursuits, of their triumphs and their glory? The flood of time has passed over them, and swept them away, as if they had never been. The *fashion of the world* changes continually around us. We succeed one another in the human course, like troops of pilgrims on their journey. Absurdly we spend our time in contending about the trifles of a day, while we ought to be preparing for a higher existence. Eternity is just at hand to close this introductory scene. It is fast rolling towards us, like the tide of a vast ocean, ready to swallow up all human concerns, and to leave no trace behind it, except the consequences of our good or bad deeds, which shall last for ever. — Let such reflections allay the heat of passion. Let them reduce all human things to their proper standard. From frivolous pursuits let them recal our attention to objects of real importance; to the proper business of man; to the improvement of our nature, the discharge of our duty, the rational and religious conduct of human life.

IN the last place, To our own endeavours for regulating our passions, let us join earnest prayer to God. Here, if any where, divine assistance is requisite. For such is the present blindness and imperfection of human nature, that even to discover all the disorders of our heart, is become difficult; much more, to rectify them, is beyond our power. To that superiour aid, then, which is promised to the pious and upright, let us look up with humble minds; beseeching the Father of mercies, that while we study to act our own part with resolution and vigilance, he would forgive our returning weakness; would strengthen our constancy in resisting the assaults of passion; and enable

* Prov. xvii. 14.

us by his grace so to govern our minds, that without considerable interruptions we may proceed in a course of piety and virtue.

It now remains to treat of the government of temper, as included in the *keeping of the heart*. Passions are quick and strong emotions, which by degrees subside. Temper is the disposition which remains after these emotions are past, and which forms the habitual propensity of the soul. The passions are like the stream when it is swoln by the torrent, and ruffled by the winds. The temper resembles it when running within its bed, with its natural velocity and force. The influence of temper is more silent and imperceptible than that of passion. It operates with less violence; but as its operation is constant, it produces effects no less considerable. It is evident, therefore, that it highly deserves to be considered in a religious view.

Many, indeed, are averse to behold it in this light. They place a good temper upon the same footing with a healthy constitution of body. They consider it as a natural felicity which some enjoy; but for the want of which, others are not morally culpable, nor accountable to God; and hence the opinion has sometimes prevailed, that a bad temper might be consistent with a state of grace. If this were true, it would overturn that whole doctrine, of which the Gospel is so full, that regeneration, or change of nature, is the essential characteristic of a Christian. It would suppose that grace might dwell amidst malevolence and rancour, and that heaven might be enjoyed by such as are strangers to charity and love.—It will readily be admitted, that some, by the original frame of their mind, are more favourably inclined than others towards certain good dispositions and habits. But this affords no justification to those who neglect to oppose the corruptions to which they are prone. Let no man imagine that the human heart is a soil altogether unsusceptible of culture; or that the worst temper may not, through the assistance of grace, be reformed by attention and discipline. Settled depravity of temper is always owing to our own indulgence. If, in place of checking, we nourish that malignity of disposition to which we are inclined, all the consequences will be placed to our account, and every excuse from natural constitution be rejected at the tribunal of Heaven.

The proper regulation of temper affects the character of man in every relation which he bears; and includes the whole circle of religious and moral duties. This, therefore, is a subject of too great extent to be comprehended in one Discourse. But it may be useful to take a general view of it; and before we conclude the doctrine of *keeping the heart*, to show what the habitual temper of a good man ought to be, with respect to God, to his neighbour, and to himself.

First, With respect to God, what he ought to cultivate is a devout temper. This imports more than the care of performing the offices of religious worship. It denotes the sensibility of heart towards the Supreme Being, which springs from a deep impression of his perfections on the soul. It stands opposed, not only to that disregard of God which forms the description of the impious, but to that absence of religious affections which sometimes prevails among those who are imperfectly good. They acknowledge, perhaps, the obligations of

duty. They feel some concern to *work out their salvation*. But they apply to their duty through mere constraint; and serve God without affection or complacency. More liberal and generous sentiments animate the man who is of a devout temper. God dwells upon his thoughts as a benefactor and a father, to whose voice he hearkens with joy. Amidst the occurrences of life, his mind naturally opens to the admiration of his wisdom, the reverence of his power, the love of his transcendent goodness. All nature appears to his view as stamped with the impress of these perfections. Habitual gratitude to his Maker for mercies past, and cheerful resignation to his will in all time to come, are the native effusions of his heart.

Such a temper as this deserves to be cultivated with the utmost attention; for it contributes, in a high degree, both to our improvement and our happiness. It refines, and it exalts human nature. It softens that hardness which our hearts are ready to contract from frequent intercourse with this rugged world. It facilitates the discharge of every duty towards God and man. At the same time it is a temper peaceful and serene, elevated and rejoicing. It forms the current of our affections to flow in a placid tenour. It opens pleasing prospects to the mind. It banishes harsh and bitter passions; and places us above the reach of many of the annoyances of worldly life. When the temper is truly devout, *the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, keepeth the heart and soul*. I proceed,

SECONDLY, To point out the proper state of our temper with respect to one another. It is evident, in the general, that if we consult either public welfare or private happiness, Christian charity ought to regulate our disposition in mutual intercourse. But as this great principle admits of several diversified appearances, let us consider some of the chief forms under which it ought to show itself in the usual tenour of life. Universal benevolence to mankind, when it rests in the abstract, is a loose indeterminate idea, rather than a principle of real effect; and too often floats as an useless speculation in the head, instead of affecting the temper and the heart.

What first presents itself to be recommended, is a peaceable temper; a disposition averse to give offence, and desirous of cultivating harmony, and amicable intercourse in society. This supposes yielding and condescending manners, unwillingness to contend with others about trifles, and, in contests that are unavoidable, proper moderation of spirit. Such a temper is the first principle of self-enjoyment. It is the basis of all order and happiness among mankind. The positive and contentious, the rude and quarrelsome, are the bane of society. They seem destined to blast the small share of comfort which nature has here allotted to man. But they cannot disturb the peace of others, more than they break their own. The hurricane rages first in their own bosom, before it is let forth upon the world. In the tempest which they raise, they are always tost; and frequently it is their lot to perish.

A peaceable temper must be supported by a candid one, or a disposition to view the conduct of others with fairness and impartiality. This stands opposed to a jealous and suspicious temper, which

ascribes every action to the worst motive, and throws a black shade over every character. As you would be happy in yourselves, or in your connections with others, guard against this malignant spirit. Study that charity *which thinketh no evil*; that temper which, without degenerating into credulity, will dispose you to be just; and which can allow you to observe an error, without imputing it as a crime. Thus you will be kept free from that continual irritation which imaginary injuries raise in a suspicious breast; and will walk among men as your brethren, not your enemies.

But to be peaceable, and to be candid, is not all that is required of a good man. He must cultivate a kind, generous, and sympathizing temper, which feels for distress, wherever it is beheld; which enters into the concerns of his friends with ardour; and to all with whom he has intercourse, is gentle, obliging, and humane. How amiable appears such a disposition, when contrasted with a malicious or envious temper, which wraps itself up in its own narrow interest, looks with an evil eye on the success of others, and with an unnatural satisfaction feeds on their disappointments or miseries! How little does he know of the true happiness of life, who is a stranger to that intercourse of good offices and kind affections, which, by a pleasing charm, attach men to one another, and circulate joy from heart to heart!

You are not to imagine, that a benevolent temper finds no exercise, unless when opportunities offer of performing actions of high generosity, or of extensive utility. These may seldom occur. The condition of the greater part of mankind, in a good measure, precludes them. But in the ordinary round of human affairs, a thousand occasions daily present themselves, of mitigating the vexations which others suffer, of soothing their minds, of aiding their interest, of promoting their cheerfulness or ease. Such occasions may relate to the smaller incidents of life. But let us remember, that of small incidents the system of human life is chiefly composed. The attentions which respect these, when suggested by real benignity of temper, are often more material to the happiness of those around us, than actions which carry the appearance of greater dignity and splendour. No wise or good man ought to account any rules of behaviour as below his regard, which tend to cement the great brotherhood of mankind in comfortable union.

Particularly amidst that familiar intercourse which belongs to domestic life, all the virtues of temper find an ample range. It is very unfortunate, that within that circle, men too often think themselves at liberty to give unrestrained vent to the caprice of passion and humour. Whereas there, on the contrary, more than any where, it concerns them to attend to the government of their heart; to check what is violent in their tempers, and to soften what is harsh in their manners. For there the temper is formed. There the real character displays itself. The forms of the world disguise men when abroad. But within his own family, every man is known to be what he truly is. — In all our intercourse, then, with others, particularly in that which is closest and most intimate, let us cultivate a peaceable, a

candid, a gentle and friendly temper. This is the temper to which, by repeated injunctions, our holy religion seeks to form us. This was the temper of Christ. This is the temper of Heaven.

WE are now to consider, thirdly, The proper state of temper, as it respects the individual himself. The basis of all the good dispositions which belong to this head, is humility. By this I understand, not that meanness of spirit which leads a man to undervalue himself; and to sink below his rank and character; but what the Scripture expresses with great propriety, when it exhorts *every man, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.** He who adopts all the flattering suggestions of self-love, and forms claims upon the world proportioned to the imaginary opinion which he has conceived of his merit, is preparing for himself a thousand mortifications. Whereas, by checking the risings of ill-founded vanity, and retreating within those bounds which a moderate estimation of our character prescribes, we escape the miseries which always pursue an arrogant mind, and recommend ourselves to the favour both of God and man.

Hence will naturally arise a contented temper, which is one of the greatest blessings that can be enjoyed by man, and one of the most material requisites to the proper discharge of the duties of every station. For, a fretful and discontented temper renders one incapable of performing aright any part in life. It is unthankful and impious towards God; and towards men, provoking and unjust. It is a gangrene, which preys on the vitals, and infects the whole constitution with disease and putrefaction. Subdue pride and vanity, and you will take the most effectual method of eradicating this distemper. You will no longer behold the objects around you with jaundiced eyes. You will take in good part the blessings which Providence is pleased to bestow, and the degree of favour which your fellow-creatures are disposed to grant you. Viewing yourselves, with all your imperfections and failings, in a just light, you will rather be surprised at your enjoying so many good things, than discontented, because there are many which you want.

From a humble and contented temper will spring a cheerful one. This, if not in itself a virtue, is at least the garb in which virtue should be always arrayed. Piety and goodness ought never to be marked with that dejection which sometimes takes rise from superstition, but which is the proper portion only of guilt. At the same time, the cheerfulness belonging to virtue is to be carefully distinguished from that light and giddy temper which characterizes folly, and is so often found among the dissipated and vicious part of mankind. Their gaiety is owing to a total want of reflexion; and brings with it the usual consequences of an unthinking habit, shame, remorse, and heaviness of heart, in the end. The cheerfulness of a well-regulated mind springs from a good conscience and the favour of Heaven, and is bounded by temperance and reason. It makes a man happy in himself, and promotes the happiness of all around him. It is the clear and calm sunshine of a mind illuminated by piety and virtue. It

* Rom. xii. 3.

crowns all other good dispositions, and comprehends the general effect which they ought to produce on the heart.

SUCH, on the whole, is the temper, or habitual frame of mind, in a good man: Devout towards God; towards men, peaceable, candid, affectionate, and humane; within himself, humble, contented, and cheerful. To the establishment of this happy temper, all the directions which I before suggested for the due regulation of the thoughts, and for the government of the passions, naturally conduce; in this they ought to issue; and when this temper is thoroughly formed within us, then may the heart be esteemed to have been *kept with all diligence*. That we may be thus enabled to keep it, for the sake both of present enjoyment, and of preparation for greater happiness, let us earnestly pray to Heaven. A greater blessing we cannot implore of the Almighty, than that he who made the human heart, and who knows its frailties, would assist us to subject it to that discipline which religion requires, which reason approves, but which his grace alone can enable us to maintain.

SERMON XIX.

ON THE UNCHANGEABLENESS OF THE DIVINE NATURE.

JAMES, i. 17.

Every good and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of Lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

THE divine nature, in some views, attracts our love; in others, commands our reverence; in all, is entitled to the highest attention from the human mind. We never elevate our thoughts, in a proper manner, towards the Supreme Being, without returning to our own sphere with sentiments more improved; and if, at any time, his greatness oppresses our thoughts, his moral perfections always afford us relief. His almighty power, his infinite wisdom, and extreme goodness, are sounds familiar to our ears. In his immutability we are less accustomed to consider him; and yet it is this perfection which, perhaps, more than any other, distinguishes the divine nature from the human; gives complete energy to all its other attributes, and entitles it to the highest adoration. For, hence are derived the regular order of nature, and the steadfastness of the universe. Hence flows the unchanging tenour of those laws which, from age to age, regulate the conduct of mankind. Hence the uniformity of that government, and the certainty of those promises, which are the ground of our trust and security. Goodness could produce no more than feeble and wavering hopes, and power would command very imperfect reverence, if we were left to suspect that the plans which goodness had framed might alter, or that the power of carrying them into execution might de-

crease. The contemplation of God, therefore, as unchangeable in his nature and in all his perfections, must undoubtedly be fruitful both of instruction and of consolation to man. I shall first endeavour to illustrate, in some degree, the nature of the divine immutability; and then make application of it to our own conduct.

EVERY good and every perfect gift, cometh down from the Father of Lights. The title which in the Text is given to the Deity, carries an elegant allusion to the Sun, the source of light, the most universal benefactor of nature, the most regular and constant of all the great bodies with which we are acquainted in the universe. Yet even with the Sun there are certain degrees of *variableness*. He apparently rises and sets; he seems to approach nearer to us in summer, and to retire farther off in winter; his influence is varied by the seasons, and his lustre is affected by the clouds. Whereas with him who is the *Father of Lights*, of whose everlasting brightness the glory of the Sun is but a faint image, there is no *shadow of turning*, not the most distant approach to change. In his being or essence it is plain that alteration can never take place. For as his existence is derived from no prior cause, nor dependent on any thing without himself, his nature can be influenced by no power, can be affected by no accident, can be impaired by no time. From everlasting to everlasting, he continues the same. Hence it is said, that *he only hath immortality*; that is, he possesses it in a manner incommunicable to all other beings. Eternity is described as the *high and holy place in which he dwelleth*; it is a habitation in which none but the *Father of Lights* can enter. The name which he taketh to himself is, *I am*. Of other things, some have been, and others shall be; but this is he, *which is, which was, and which is to come*. All time is his; it is measured out by him in limited portions to the various orders of created beings; but his own existence fills equally every point of duration; *the first and the last, the beginning and the end, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*.

As in his essence, so in his attributes and perfections, it is impossible there can be any change. To imperfect natures only it belongs to improve and to decay. Every alteration which they undergo in their abilities or dispositions, flows either from internal defect, or from the influence of a superiour cause. But as no higher cause can bring from without any accession to the divine nature, so within itself it contains no principle of decay. For the same reason that the self-existent Being was from the beginning powerful and wise, just and good, he must continue unalterably so for ever. Hence, with much propriety, the divine perfections are described in Scripture by allusions to those objects to which we ascribe the most permanent stability. *His righteousness is like the strong mountains. His mercy is in the heavens; and his faithfulness reacheth unto the clouds.* These perfections of the divine nature differ widely from the human virtues, which are their faint shadows. The justice of men is at one time severe, at another time relenting; their goodness is sometimes confined to a partial fondness for a few, sometimes runs out into a blind indul-

gence towards all. But goodness and justice are in the Supreme Being calm and steady principles of action, which, enlightened by perfect wisdom, and never either warped by partiality, or disturbed by passion, persevere in one regular and constant tenour. Among men, they may sometimes break forth with transient splendour, like those wandering fires which illuminate for a little the darkness of the night. But in God, they shine with that uniform brightness, which we can liken to nothing so much as to the untroubled, eternal lustre of the highest heavens.

From this follows, what is chiefly material for us to attend to, that in the course of his operations towards mankind, in his counsels and decrees, in his laws, his promises, and in his threatenings, there is *no variableness nor shadow of turning* with the Almighty. *Known to him from the beginning were all his works.* In the divine idea the whole system of nature existed, long before the foundations of the earth were laid. When he said, *Let there be light*, he only realised the great plan which, from everlasting, he had formed in his own mind. Foreseen by him was every revolution which the course of ages was to produce. Whatever the counsels of men can effect, was comprehended in his decree. No new emergency can arise to surprise him. No agitations of anger or of sorrow, of fear or of hope, can shake his mind or influence his conduct. He rests in the eternal possession of that Supreme beatitude, which neither the virtues nor the crimes of men can in the least affect. From a motive of overflowing goodness, he reared up the universe. As the eternal lover of righteousness, he rules it. The whole system of his government is fixed; his laws are irrevocable; and, what he once loveth, *he loveth to the end*. In Scripture, indeed, he is sometimes said to *be grieved*, and to *repent*. But such expressions, it is obvious, are employed from accommodation to common conception; in the same manner as when bodily organs are, in other passages, ascribed to God. The Scripture, as a rule of life addressed to the multitude, must make use of the language of men. The divine nature, represented in it; native sublimity, would have transcended all human conception. When, upon the reformation of sinners, God is said to *repent of the evil* which he hath threatened against them; this intimates no more than that he suits his dispensations to the alterations which take place in the characters of men. His disposition towards good and evil continues the same, but varies in its application as its objects vary; just as the laws themselves, which are capable of no change of affection, bring rewards or punishments at different times to the same person, according as his behaviour alters. Immutability is indeed so closely connected with the notion of supreme perfection, that wherever any rational conceptions of a Deity have taken place, this attribute has been ascribed to him. Reason taught the wise and reflecting in every age to believe, that as what is eternal cannot die, so what is perfect can never vary, and that the great Governour of the universe could be no other than an unchangeable Being.

From the contemplation of this obvious, but fundamental truth, let us proceed to the practical improvement of it. Let us consider

what effect the serious consideration of it ought to produce on our mind and behaviour.

It will be proper to begin this head of discourse by removing an objection which the doctrine I have illustrated may appear to form against religious services, and in particular against the duty of prayer. To what purpose, it may be urged, is homage addressed to a Being whose purpose is unalterably fixed; to whom *our righteousness extendeth not*; whom by no arguments we can persuade, and by no supplications we can mollify? The objection would have weight, if our religious addresses were designed to work any alteration on God; either by giving him information of what he did not know; or by exciting affections which he did not possess; or by inducing him to change measures which he had previously formed. But they are only crude and imperfect notions of religion which can suggest such ideas. The change which our devotions are intended to make, is upon ourselves, not upon the Almighty. Their chief efficacy is derived from the good dispositions which they raise and cherish in the human soul. By pouring out pious sentiments and desires before God, by adoring his perfection, and confessing our own unworthiness, by expressing our dependance on his aid, our gratitude for his past favours, our submission to his present will, our trust in his future mercy, we cultivate such affections as suit our place and station in the universe, and are thereby prepared for becoming objects of the divine grace. Accordingly, frequent assurances are given us in Scripture; that the prayers of sincere worshippers, preferred through the great Mediator, shall be productive of the happiest effects. *When they ask, they shall receive; when they seek, they shall find; when they knock, it shall be opened to them.* Prayer is appointed to be the channel for conveying the divine grace to mankind, because the wisdom of Heaven saw it to be one of the most powerful means of improving the human heart.

When religious homage is considered in this light, as a great instrument of spiritual and moral improvement, all the objections which scepticism can form from the divine immutability, conclude with no more force against prayer, than against every other mean of improvement which reason has suggested to man. If prayer be superfluous, because God is unchangeable, we might upon similar grounds conclude, that it is needless to labour the earth, to nourish our bodies, or to cultivate our minds, because the fertility of the ground, the continuance of our life, and the degree of our understanding, depend upon an immutable Sovereign, and were from all eternity foreseen by him. Such absurd conclusions reason has ever repudiated. To every plain and sound understanding it has clearly dictated, that to explore the unknown purposes of Heaven belongs not to us; but that He who decrees the end, certainly requires the means; and that, in the diligent employment of all the means which can advance either our temporal or spiritual felicity, the chief exertions of human wisdom and human duty consist. Assuming it then for an undoubted principle, that religion is a reasonable service, and that, though with the *Father of Lights* there be *no variableness*, the homage of his creatures is nevertheless, for the wisest reasons, required by him, I proceed.

to show what sentiments the contemplation of divine immutability should raise in our minds, and what duties it should chiefly enforce.

I. LET it excite us to admire and adore. Filled with profound reverence, let us look up to that Supreme Being who sits from everlasting on the throne of the universe; moving all things, but remaining immoveable himself; directing every revolution of the creation, but affected by no revolutions of events or of time. He beholds the heavens and the earth *wax old as a garment, and decay like a vesture*. At their appointed periods he raises up, or he dissolves worlds! But amidst all the convulsions of changing and perishing nature, his glory and felicity remain unaltered. — The view of great and stupendous objects in the natural world strikes the mind with solemn awe. What veneration, then, ought to be inspired by the contemplation of an object so sublime as the eternal and unchangeable Ruler of the universe! The composure and stillness of thought introduced by such a meditation, has a powerful tendency both to purify and to elevate the heart. It effaces, for a time, those trivial ideas, and extinguishes those low passions, which arise from the circle of vain and passing objects around us. It opens the mind to all the sentiments of devotion; and accompanies devotion with that profound reverence, which guards it from every improper excess. When we consider the Supreme Being as employed in works of love; when we think of his condescension to the human race in sending his Son to dwell on the earth; encouraged by favours and warmed by gratitude, we are sometimes in danger of presuming too much on his goodness, and of indulging a certain fondness of affection, which is unsuitable to our humble and dependent state. It is necessary that he should frequently appear to our minds, in all that majesty with which the immutability of his nature clothes him; in order that reverence may be combined with love, and that a mixture of sacred awe may chasten the rapturous effusions of warm devotion. Servile fear, indeed, would crush the spirit of ingenuous and affectionate homage. But that reverence which springs from elevated conceptions of the divine nature, has a happy effect in checking the forwardness of imagination, restraining our affections within due bounds, and composing our thoughts at the same time that it exalts them.

When, from the adoration of the unchangeable perfection of the Almighty, we return to the view of our own state, the first sentiment which ought naturally to arise, is that of self-abasement. We are too apt to be lifted up by any little distinctions which we possess; and to fancy ourselves great, only because there are others whom we consider as less. But what is man, with all his advantages and boasted powers, before the eternal *Father of Lights*? With God there is no variableness; with man there is no stability. Virtue and vice divide the empire of his mind; and wisdom and folly alternately rule him. Hence he is changeable in his designs, fickle in his friendships, fluctuating in his whole character. His life is a series of contradictions. He is one thing to-day, and another to-morrow; sometimes obliged by experience to alter his purpose, and often led to change it through levity. Variable and unequal himself, he is sur-

rounded with fleeting objects. He is placed as in the midst of a torrent, where all things are rolling by, and nothing keeps its place. He has hardly time to contemplate this scene of vicissitude, before he too is swept away. Thus circumstanced in himself, and in all the objects with which he is connected, let him be admonished to be humble and modest. Let the contemplation of the unchanging glory of his Creator inspire him with sentiments of due submission. Let it teach him to know his proper place; and check that vanity which is so ready to betray him into guilt.

Let the same meditation affect him with a deep sense of what he owes to the goodness of the Deity. His goodness never appears in so striking a light, as when viewed in connection with his greatness. The description which is given of him in the Text, calls, in this view, for our particular attention. It presents to us the most amiable union of condescension with majesty, of the moral with the natural perfections of God, which can possibly be exhibited to the imagination of man. *From the Father of Lights, with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning, cometh down every good and perfect gift.* The most independent of all Beings is represented as the most beneficent. He who is eternal and immutable, exalted above all, and incapable of receiving returns from any, is the liberal and unwearied Giver of every thing that is good.—Let such views of the divine nature not only call forth gratitude and praise, but prompt us to imitate what we adore. Let them show us that benevolence is divine; that to stoop from our fancied grandeur in order to assist and relieve one another, is so far from being any degradation of character, that it is our truest honour, and our nearest resemblance to *the Father of Lights*.

II. LET the consideration of the divine immutability convince us, that the method of attaining the favour of Heaven is one and invariable. Were the Almighty a capricious and inconstant Being, like man, we should be at a loss what tenour of conduct to hold. In order to conciliate his grace, we might think of applying sometimes to one supposed principle of his inclination, sometimes to another; and, bewildered amidst various attempts, would be overwhelmed with dismay. The guilty would essay to flatter him. The timid, sometimes by austere mortifications, sometimes by costly gifts, sometimes by obsequious rites, would try to appease him. Hence, in fact, have arisen all the corruptions of religious worship among men; from their forming the divine character upon their own, and ascribing to the Sovereign of the Universe the mutability of human passions. God is represented by the psalmist David as saying to the wicked, *Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself.** This continues to be the description of all the superstitious and enthusiastic sects, which, since the days of David, have sprung up in the world.

It is our peculiar happiness, under the Gospel, to have God revealed to us in his genuine character; as *without variableness or shadow of turning*. We know that at no time there is any change, either in his affections, or in the plan of his administration. One light al-

* Psalm l. 21.

ways shines upon us from above. One clear and direct path is always pointed out to man. The Supreme Being is, and was, and ever will be, the supporter of order and virtue; the *righteous Lord loving righteousness*. The external forms of religion may vary; but under all dispensations which proceed from God, its substance is the same. It tends continually to one point, the purification of man's heart and life. This was the object of the original law of nature. This was the scope of the Mosaic institution amidst all its sacrifices and rites; and this is unquestionably the end of the Gospel. So invariably constant is God to this purpose, that the dispensation of mercy in Christ Jesus, which admits of the vicarious atonement and righteousness of a Redeemer, makes no change in our obligation to fulfil the duties of a good life. The Redeemer himself hath taught us, that to the end of time the moral law continues in its full force; and that *till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or tittle shall in no wise pass from it*.^{*} This is the only institution known to men, whose authority is unchanging and constant. Human laws rise and fall with the empires that gave them birth. Systems of philosophy vary with the progress of knowledge and light. Manners, sentiments, and opinions, alter with the course of time. But throughout all ages, and amidst all revolutions, the rule of moral and religious conduct is the same. It partakes of that immutability of the divine nature, on which it is founded. Such as it was delivered to the first worshippers of God, it continues to be, at this day, to us; and such it shall remain to our posterity for ever.

III. LET the contemplation of this perfection of the divine nature teach us to imitate, as far as our frailty will permit, that constancy and steadfastness which we adore. All the moral attributes of the Supreme Being are standards of character towards which we ought to aspire. But as in all these perfections there are properties peculiar to the divine nature, our endeavours to resemble them are laid under great restrictions by the dissimilarity between our nature and the divine. With respect to that attribute which we now consider, the circumstances are evident which preclude improper imitation. To man it is frequently necessary to correct his errors, and to change his conduct. An attempt, therefore, to continue wholly invariable, would, in our situation, be no other than imprudent and criminal obstinacy. But without the immediate rectitude of the Deity should lead us to aspire after fixedness of principle, and uniformity in conduct, as the glory of the rational nature. Impressed with the sense of that supreme excellence which results from unchanging goodness, faithfulness, and truth, let us become ashamed of that levity which degrades the human character. Let us *ponder our paths*, act upon a well-regulated plan, and remain consistent with ourselves. Contemplating the glory of the Father of Lights, let us aim at being transformed, in some degree, *into the same image, from glory to glory*. Finally,

IV. LET the divine immutability become the ground of confidence and trust to good men, amidst all the revolutions of this uncertain world. This is one of the chief improvements to be made of the sub-

^{*} Matt. v. 18.

ject, and therefore requires full illustration. There are three lights in which we may view the benefit redounding to us from that attribute of God which we now consider. It assures us of the constancy of Nature; of the regular administration of Providence; of the certain accomplishment of all the divine promises.

First, It gives us ground to depend on the constant and uniform course of Nature. On the unchangeableness of God rests the stability of the universe. What we call the laws of Nature, are no other than the decrees of the Supreme Being. It is because He is *without variableness or shadow of turning*, that those laws have continued the same since the beginning of the world; that the Sun so constantly observes his time of rising and going down; that the seasons annually return; the tides periodically ebb and flow; the earth yields its fruit at stated intervals; and the human body and mental powers advance to maturity by a regular progress. In all those motions and operations which are incessantly going on throughout nature, there is no stop nor interruption; no change nor innovation; no deflection from their main scope. The same powerful and steady hand which gave the first impulse to the powers of nature, restrains them from ever exceeding their prescribed line. Hence arises the chief comfort of our present life. We find ourselves in a regular and orderly world. We look forward to a known succession of events. We are enabled to form plans of action. From the cause, we calculate the effect; and from the past, we reason with confidence concerning the future.

Accustomed from our infancy to this constancy in Nature, we are hardly sensible of the blessing. Familiarity has the same effect here, as in many other enjoyments, to efface gratitude. But let us, for a moment, take an opposite view of things. Let us suppose, that we had any cause to dread capriciousness or change in the Power who rules the course of Nature; any ground to suspect that, but for one day, the Sun might not rise, nor the current of the waters hold their usual course, nor the laws of motion and vegetation proceed as we have been accustomed to behold them. What dismay would instantly fill all hearts! What horror would seem to overspread the whole face of Nature! What part could we act, or whither could we run, in the midst of convulsions, which overturned all the measures we had formed for happiness, or for safety? The present abode of man would then become, as Job describes the region of the grave, *a land of darkness, as darkness itself; and the shadow of death; without any order; and where the light is as darkness.** With what joy ought we then to recognise an unvarying and steadfast Ruler, under whose dominion we have no such disasters to dread; but can depend on the course of Nature continuing to proceed as it has ever gone on, until the period shall arrive of its final dissolution!

BUT though the great laws of Nature be constant like their Author, yet in the affairs of men there is much variety and change. All that regards our present possessions and enjoyments was, for wise reasons, left, in a great measure, uncertain; and from this uncertainty arises the distress of human life. Sensible of the changes to which we lie

* Job, x. 22.

open, we look round with anxious eyes, and eagerly grasp at every object which appears to promise us security. But in vain is the whole circle of human things explored with this view. There is nothing on earth so stable as to assure us of undisturbed rest, nor so powerful as to afford us constant protection. Time, death, and change, triumph over all the labours of men. What we build up, they incessantly destroy. The public condition of nations, and the private fortunes of individuals, are alike subject to reverse. Life never retains long the same form. Its whole scenery is continually shifting round' us. — Amidst those endless vicissitudes, what can give any firm consolation, any satisfying rest to the heart, except the dominion of a wise and righteous Sovereign, *with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning?* Though all things change, and we ourselves be involved in the general mutability, yet as long as there is fixed and permanent goodness at the head of the universe, we are assured that the great interests of all good men shall be safe. That *river perpetually flows, the streams whereof make glad the city of God.* We know that the Supreme Being loved righteousness from the beginning of days, and that he will continue to love it to the last. Under his government none of those revolutions happen which have place among the kingdoms of the earth; where princes die, and new sovereigns ascend the throne; new ministers and new counsels succeed; the whole face of affairs is changed; and former plans fall into oblivion. But *the throne of the Lord is established for ever; and the thoughts of his heart endure to all generations.* We serve the same God whom our fathers worshipped, and whom our posterity shall adore. His unchanging dominion comprehends all events and all ages; establishes a connecting principle which holds together the past, the present, and the future; gives stability to things which in themselves are fluctuating, and extracts order from those which appear most confused. Well may *the earth rejoice, and the multitude of isles be glad,* because there reigneth over the universe such an immutable Lord.

Were you to unhinge this great article of faith; were you either to *say with the fool*, that there is *no God*, or to suppose with the superstitious, that the God who rules is variable and capricious; you would, indeed, *lay the axe to the root of the tree*, and cut down with one blow, the hope and security of mankind. For you would then leave nothing in the whole compass of nature, but a round of casual and transitory being; no foundation of trust, no protection to the righteous, no steadfast principle to uphold and to regulate the succession of existence. Instead of that magnificent spectacle which the world now exhibits, when beheld in connection with the divine government, it would then only present to view a multitude of short-lived creatures, springing out of the dust, wandering on the face of the earth without guide or protector, struggling for a few years against the torrent of uncertainty and change; and then sinking into utter oblivion, and vanishing like visions of the night. Mysterious obscurity would involve the beginning of things; disorder would mark their progress; and the blackness of darkness would cover their final result. Whereas, when Faith enables us to recover

an universal Sovereign, whose power never fails, and whose wisdom and goodness never change, the prospect clears up on every side. A ray from the great source of light seems to illuminate the whole creation. Good men discover a parent and a friend. They attain a fortress in every danger; a refuge amidst all storms; a dwelling-place in all generations. They are no longer afraid of evil tidings. *Their heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.*

THOUGH these reasonings, from the unchanging tenour of divine government, cannot but afford much comfort to good men, their satisfaction, however, becomes still more complete, when they consider the explicit promises which are given them in the word of God. The immutability of the divine purpose assures them most perfectly of those promises being fulfilled in due time, how adverse soever circumstances may at present appear to their accomplishment. *The Strength of Israel is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent. Hath he said it, and shall he not do it? Hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?* Men have the command only of the present time. When that is suffered to pass, changes may befall, either in their own state, or in the situation of things around them, which shall defeat their best intentions in our behalf, and render all their promises fruitless. Hence, even setting aside the danger of human inconstancy, the confidence which we can repose on any earthly protector is extremely imperfect. Man, in his highest glory, is but a reed floating on the stream of time, and forced to follow every new direction of the current. But God is the rock of ages. All time is equally in his hands. Intervening accidents cannot embarrass him; nor any unforeseen obstacle retard the performance of his most distant promise. *One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years are as one day.* There is novissitude in the human state in which good men cannot take sanctuary with him as a sure and abiding friend; the safe conductor of their pilgrimage here, as well as the eternal rest of their souls hereafter. All their patrons may desert them, and all their friends may die; but *the Lord still lives, who is their rock; and the most high God, who is their Redeemer.*

He hath promised that he *will not leave them when they are old, nor forsake them when their strength faileth*; and that even when *their hearts shall faint, and their flesh fail, he will be the strength of their heart, and their portion for ever.* His immutability is not only the ground of trust in him during their own abode on earth, but gives them the satisfaction of looking forward to the same wise and good administration as continued to the end of time. When departing hence, and bidding adieu to life, with all its changeful scenes, they can with comfort and peace leave their family, their friends, and their dearest concerns, in the hands of that God who reigneth for ever; and whose countenance shall always behold the upright with the same complacency. *My days are like a shadow that declineth, and I am withered like the grass. But thou, O Lord, shalt endure for ever; and thy remembrance to all generations. The children of thy servants shall continue; and their seed shall be established before thee.**

* Psalm cii. 11, 12. 28.

SUCH are the benefits which good men may derive from meditating on God *as without variableness or shadow of turning*. It inspires them with sentiments of devout, humble, and grateful adoration. It points out to them the unvarying tenour of conduct which they ought to hold; checks their fickleness and inconstancy; and, amidst all distresses and fears, affords them comfort. The immutability of God is the surest basis on which their hopes can be built. It is indeed the pillar on which the whole universe rests.—On such serious and solemn meditations let our thoughts often dwell, in order to correct that folly and levity which are so apt to take possession of the human heart. And if our minds be overawed, and even depressed with so high a view of the divine nature, let them be relieved by the reflection, that to this unchangeable God we are permitted to look up, through a gracious Mediator, who, though possessed of divine perfection, is not unconscious of human distress and frailty.

SERMON XX.

ON THE COMPASSION OF CHRIST.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

HEBREWS, iv. 15.

We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feelings of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin

WHEN we compare the counsels of Providence with the plans of men, we find a like difference obtain, as in the works of nature compared with those of art. The works of art may, at first view, appear the most finished and beautiful; but when the eye is assisted to pry into their texture, the nicest workmanship is discerned to be rough and blemished. Whereas the works of nature gain by the most accurate examination; and those which on a superficial survey appear defective or rude, the more intimately they are inspected, discover the more exact construction and consummate beauty. In the same manner, the systems of worldly policy, though at first they seem plausible and profound, soon betray in their progress the narrowness of the human understanding; while those dispensations of Providence, which appeared to furnish objections either against the goodness or the wisdom of Heaven, have, upon a more extensive view of their consequences, frequently afforded the most striking proofs of both.

God manifested in the flesh, was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. It contradicted every prepossession which their confined ideas of religion and philosophy led them to entertain. If a superiour Being was to interpose for the restoration of a degenerate world, they concluded that he would certainly appear in celestial majesty. But *the thoughts of God are not as the thoughts of men.* The divine wisdom saw it to be fit that the Saviour of mankind should *in all things be made like unto those whom he came to save.* By living

as a man among men, he dispensed instruction in the most winning manner. He added to instruction the grace and the force of his own example. He accommodated that example to the most trying and difficult situations of human life; and, by suffering a painful death, he both taught men how to suffer and die; and in that nature which had offended, he offered a solemn expiation to God for human guilt.

Besides these ends, so worthy of God, which were accomplished by the incarnation of Christ, another, of high importance, is suggested in the Text. Human life is to good men, as well as to others, a state of suffering and distress. To supply them with proper consolation and encouragement during such a state, was one great purpose of the undertaking of Christ. With this view he assumed the office of their high priest, or mediator with God; and the encouragement which this office affords them, will be proportioned to their assured belief, first of his power, and next of his compassion. His power is set forth in the verse preceding the Text, and the proper argument is founded upon it. *Seeing that we have a great high priest who is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.* But though it be encouraging to know that our high priest is the *Son of God*, and that he is *passed into the heavens*, yet these facts alone are not sufficient to render him the full object of our confidence. For, as the apostle afterwards observes, it belongs to the character of a high priest to be taken from among men, that he may have compassion on the ignorant and them that are out of the way, seeing that he himself is compassed with infirmity. In order then to satisfy us of our high priest's possessing also the qualifications of mercy and compassion, we are told that he is *touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and was in all points tempted like as we are.* The force of this consideration I purpose now to illustrate. I shall first explain the facts which are stated in the Text, and then show how from these our Saviour's compassion is to be inferred, and in what manner it may be accommodated to the consolation and hope of good men amidst various exigencies of life.

THE assertion in the Text, of Christ's being *touched with the feeling of our infirmities*, plainly implies that he had full experience, both of the external distresses, and of the internal sorrows, of human nature. Assuming a body such as ours, he subjected himself to all the natural consequences of corporeal frailty. He did not choose for himself an easy and opulent condition, in order to glide through the world with the least molestation. He did not suit his mission to the upper ranks of mankind chiefly, by assimilating his state to theirs; but, born in meanness, and bred up to labour, he submitted to the inconveniencies of that poor and toilsome life which falls to the share of the most numerous part of the human race. Whatever is severe in the disregard of relations or the ingratitude of friends, in the scorn of the proud or the insult of the mean, in the virulence of reproach or the sharpness of pain, was undergone by Christ. Though his life was short, he familiarised himself in it with a wide compass of human woe; and there is almost no distressful situation to which we can be reduced, but what he has experienced before us. There is not the least reason to imagine that the eminence of his nature raised him above the sens-

ations of trouble and grief. Had this been the case, he would have been a sufferer in appearance only, not in reality; there would have been no merit in his patience, or in the resignation which he expressed. On the contrary, it appears, from many circumstances, that the sensibility of his nature was tender and exquisite. He affected none of that hard indifference in which some ancient philosophers vainly gloried. He felt as a man, and he sympathized with the feelings of others. On different occasions we are informed that he was *troubled in spirit*, that *he groaned*, and that *he wept*. The relation of his agony in the garden of Gethsemane exhibits a striking picture of the sensations of innocent nature oppressed with anguish. It discovers all the conflict between the dread of suffering on the one hand, and the sense of duty on the other; the man struggling for a while with human weakness, and in the end recollected in virtue, and rising superiour to the objects of dismay which were then in his view. *Father! if it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt. Thy will be done.* Thus was our Saviour touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief.

It is added in the Text, that he was *in all points tempted like as we are*. To be tempted is, in the language of Scripture, to undergo such trials of virtue as are accompanied with difficulty and conflict. Though our Lord was not liable to any temptations from depravity of nature, yet he was perpetually exposed to such as arise from situations the most adverse to virtue. His whole life was in this respect a course of temptation; that is, a severe trial of his constancy by every discouragement. He suffered repeated provocations both from friends and foes. His endeavours to do good were requited with the most obstinate and perverse opposition. Sometimes by the solicitations of ignorant multitudes he was tempted to accept the proffers of worldly greatness. Oftener, by the insults of multitudes, more blind and brutal, he was tempted to desert an office which exposed him to so much misery. Together with the world, the powers of darkness also combined their efforts against him. We are informed that he was *led into the wilderness*, and, amidst the horrors of a wild and dreary solitude, was *tempted of the devil*. The great adversary of mankind seems to have been permitted to exert unusual proofs of his power and malice, on purpose that the trial of our Saviour's constancy might be more complete, and his victory over him more illustrious and distinguished.

From all these circumstances, the conclusion is obvious, that our Lord knows, from personal experience, all the discouragements and temptations which virtue can suffer. Though he participated not of the corruption, yet he felt the weakness of human nature. He felt the strength of passion. He is no stranger to the disturbance and commotion, which either the attacks of the world, or the powers of darkness, are able to raise within the breast of man. One remarkable difference, indeed, takes place between our temptations and those of Christ. Though he was *tempted like as we are, yet he was without sin*. Though the conflict was the same, the issue was different. We are

often foiled; He always overcame. But his disconformity to us in this respect, is far from weakening the strength of our present argument. For sin contracts and hardens the heart. Every degree of guilt incurred by yielding to temptation, tends to debase the mind, and to weaken the generous and benevolent principles of human nature. If, from our Lord's being *tempted like us we are*, we have any ground to expect his sympathy; from his being tempted, *yet without sin*, we are entitled to hope that his sympathy, unallayed and perfect, will operate with more complete energy.

FROM this view of the facts which are stated in the Text, I proceed to show how justly we may infer our Saviour's compassion, and in what manner it is to be accommodated to the consolation of good men amidst various exigencies of life.

It has been the universal opinion of mankind, that personal experience of suffering humanizes the heart. In the school of affliction, compassion is always supposed to be most thoroughly learned; and hence, in the laws of Moses, when the Israelites are commanded not to oppress the stranger, this reason is given, *for you know the heart of a stranger, seeing ye were strangers yourselves in the land of Egypt.** The distressed, accordingly, fly for consolation to those who have been their companions in woe. They decline the prosperous, and look up to them with a suspicious eye. They consider them as ignorant of their feelings, and therefore regardless of their complaints. Amidst the manifold sorrows of life, then, how soothing is the thought, that our great Intercessor with God was a fellow-sufferer with ourselves, while he passed through this valley of tears.

But was it necessary for Christ, it may be said, to assume our nature in order to acquire the knowledge of its infirmity and distress? As a divine person, was he not perfectly acquainted with our frame before he descended to the earth? Did he stand in need of being prompted to compassion by the experience of our sorrows? Could his experimental knowledge of human weakness increase the benevolence of a nature which before was perfect? — No: he submitted to be *touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and to be tempted like as we are*; not in order to become acquainted with our nature, but to satisfy us that he knew it perfectly; not in order to acquire any new degree of goodness, but to give us the firmer confidence in the goodness which he possessed, and to convey the sense of it to our hearts with greater force and effect.

Distrust is a weakness peculiarly incident to the miserable. They are apt to reject hope, to indulge fear, and to tinge, with the dark colour of their own minds, every object which is offered for their encouragement. The representations given us of the Deity in Scripture, afford undoubtedly much ground for trust in his goodness. But the perfection of an Almighty Being, who dwelleth in the secret place of eternity, *whom no man hath seen or can see*, is overwhelming to a timid apprehension. The goodness which it promises, is a new and unknown form of goodness. Whatever proceeds from a nature so far superiour to our own, is beheld with a degree of awe, which is

* Exodus, xxiii. 9.

ready to overpower hope. Upon this account, under the Old Testament dispensation, the Supreme Being is often described with the attributes of a man, in order to give a shade and softening to his greatness, and to accommodate his goodness more to our capacity. The relentings of a friend, the pity of a parent, and the sighs of a mourner, are ascribed to the Almighty. But we easily perceive such attributes to be no more than figures and allusions. The comfort which they afford, is not definite nor precise. They leave the mind under an anxious uncertainty, lest it err in its interpretation of those allegories of mercy. In the person of Jesus Christ, the object of our trust is brought nearer to ourselves; and of course adapted more effectually to our encouragement. Those well-known tender affections, which are only figuratively ascribed to the Divinity, are in our great Mediator thoroughly realized. His goodness is the goodness of human nature exalted and rendered perfect. It is that species of goodness with which we are best acquainted, compassion to the unhappy; and compassion cultivated by that discipline which we know to be the most powerful, the experience of sorrows.

For such reasons as these, *because the children are partakers of flesh and blood, Christ himself likewise took part of the same. In all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful as well as a faithful high priest.* When we consider his assumption of our nature in this light, what a mild and amiable aspect does it give to the government of Heaven! What attentive solicitude of goodness is shown in carrying on the dispensation of our redemption upon a plan so perfectly calculated to banish all distrust, and to revive the most timid and dejected heart! How naturally does that inference follow which the Apostle makes in the verse immediately succeeding the Text; *let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need!* More particularly, in consequence of the doctrine which I have illustrated, we are taught to hope,

I. THAT, under all our infirmities and errors, regard will be had to human imperfection; that a merciful distinction will be made between what is weak and what is wilfully criminal in our conduct; and that such measures of obedience only will be exacted, as are proportioned to our circumstances and powers. What can more encourage our religious services, than to be assured that the God whom we worship, *knows our frame, and remembers we are dust*; and that the Mediator, through whom we worship him, *is touched with the feeling of our infirmities*? The most virtuous are the most apt to be dejected with the sense of their frailty. While vain and superficial men are easily flattered with favourable views of themselves, and fond hopes of divine acceptance, the slightest apprehension of guilt is ready to alarm the humble and delicate mind; just as on coarse bodies an impression is not easily made, while those of finer contexture are soon hurt; and as on an exquisite polish the least speck is visible. But though religion promotes great sensibility to all feelings of a moral nature, yet it gives no countenance to excessive and superstitious fears. That humility which checks presumption, and that jea-

lousy which inspires vigilance, are favourable to piety; while those suspicions which lead to despondency are injurious to God, hurtful to ourselves, and repugnant to that whole system of mercy which I have been illustrating.

You complain, that when you engage in the solemn exercises of devotion, your spirits are depressed by a load of cares and sorrows; that in your thoughts there is no composure, and in your affections no elevation; that after your utmost essays, you are incapable of fixing your attention steadily on God, or of sending up your prayers to him with becoming warmth and fulness of heart. This debility and wandering of mind you are apt to impute to some uncommon degree of guilt. You consider it as the symptom of incurable hardness of heart, and as a melancholy proof of your being abandoned by God. — Such fears as these in a great measure refute themselves. If you were really obdurate, you would be insensible of guilt. Your complaints of hardness of heart, are an evidence of your heart being at that moment contrite and actually relenting. — Are there any circumstances of inward discomposure and perplexity, of which he is unconscious, who at a critical period of his life was *heavy and sore amazed**; who was obliged to complain that his soul was *troubled within him*; and to acknowledge that though *the spirit was willing, yet the flesh was weak*? To a superiour nature, untouched with human frailty, you might in such situations look up with some degree of terror. But He, who remembers the struggles of his own soul, will not, surely, judge yours like a hard and unfeeling master. Acquainted with the inmost recesses of human nature, he perceives the sincerity of your intentions; he sees the combat you maintain; he knows how much of your present confusion and disorder is to be imputed, not to your inclination and will, but to an infirm, an aged or diseased body, or to a weak and wounded spirit; and therefore will be far from rejecting your attempts to serve him, on account of the infirmities which you lament. He hears the voice of those secret aspirations which you are unable to express in words, or to form into prayer. Every penitential tear which your contrition sheds, pleads your cause more powerfully with him, than all the arguments with which you could fill your mouth.

II. FROM our Saviour's experience of human misery, we may justly hope that he will so compassionately regard our distressed estate, as to prevent us from being loaded with unnecessary troubles. He will not wantonly add affliction to the afflicted; nor willingly crush what he sees to be already broken. In the course of that high administration which he now exercises, he may indeed judge certain intermixtures of adversity to be proper for our improvement. These are trials of virtue through which all, without exception, must pass. Rugged was the road by which our divine Mediator himself went before us to glory; and by becoming our companion in distress, he meant to reconcile us to our lot. He ennobled adversity, by sharing it with us. He raised poverty from contempt, by assuming it for his own condition. The severity of his trials tends to lighten

* Mark, xiv. 33.

ours. When the general of an army lies on the same hard ground, drinks of the same cold stream, carries the same weight of armour with the lowest sentinel, can any of his soldiers repine at what they endure?

Whatever afflictions our Lord may judge to be necessary for us, of this we may rest assured, that he will deal them forth, not with harsh and imperious authority, but with the tenderness of one who knows from experience how deeply the human heart is wounded by every stroke of adversity. He will not lay more upon us than he sees we are able to bear. *Though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his tender mercies. He will stay his rough wind in the day of the east wind**: For it is his state, but not his nature, which is now changed. Notwithstanding his high exaltation, he still retains the compassionate sentiments of *the man of sorrows*. Still, we are assured by an inspired writer, *he is not ashamed to call us brethren*.† And with the heart of a brother, he regards those few and troubled days, such as his own once were, which good men are doomed to pass in this evil world.

From his compassion, indeed, we are not to expect that fond indulgence or unseasonable relief by which the weak pity of men frequently injures its objects. It is to the material interests, more than to the present ease, of good men, that he attends. When under the impatience of sorrow we exclaim, *Hath he forgotten to be gracious? hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* we recollect not in whose hands we are. His compassion is not diminished, when its operations are most concealed. It continues equally to flow, though the channels by which it is conducted towards us lie too deep for our observation. Amidst our present ignorance of what is good or ill for us in this life, it is sufficient for us to know, that the immediate administration of universal government is placed in the hands of the most attentive and compassionate friend of mankind. How greatly does this consideration alleviate the burden of human woe! How happily does it connect with the awful dispensations of religion the mildest ideas of tenderness and humanity!

III. THE Text leads us to hope, that amidst all the infirmities of our state, both under the temptations and under the distresses of life, our Blessed Lord will afford us a proper measure of assistance and support. *In that he hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them who either suffer, or are tempted*‡; that is, he is perfectly qualified for discharging this beneficent office; he knows exactly where the wound bleeds, where the burden presses, what relief will prove most seasonable, and how it can be most successfully applied. The manner in which it is conveyed by him to the heart, we may be at a loss to explain; but no argument can be thence drawn against the credibility of the fact. The operations which the power of God carries on in the natural world, are no less mysterious than those which we are taught to believe that his spirit performs in the moral world. If we can give no account of what is every day before our eyes, how a seed becomes a tree, or how the child rises into a man, is it any wonder that we should be unable to explain how virtue is supported,

* Isaiah, xxvii. 8.

† Heb. ii. 11.

‡ Heb. ii. 18.

and constancy strengthened by God within the heart? If men by their counsels and suggestions can influence the minds of one another, must not divine suggestion and counsel produce a much greater effect? Surely, the Father of Spirits must, by a thousand ways, have access to the spirits which he has made, so as to give them what determination, or impart to them what assistance he thinks proper, without injuring their frame, or disturbing their rational powers.

Accordingly, whenever any notions of religion have taken place among mankind, this belief has in some measure prevailed, that, to the virtuous under distress, aid was communicated from above. This sentiment is so congruous to our natural impressions of the divine benignity, that both among poets and philosophers of ancient times it was a favourite idea, and often occurs in their writings. But what among them was no more than loose conjecture or feeble hope, has received full confirmation from the gospel of Christ. Not only is the promise of divine assistance expressly given to Christians, but their faith in that promise is strengthened by an argument which must carry conviction to every heart. If Christ had full experience of the insufficiency of human nature to overcome the difficulties wherewith it is now surrounded, will he withhold from his followers that grace without which he sees they must perish in the evil day? If, in the season of his temptation and distress, an angel was sent from heaven *to strengthen him**, shall no celestial messenger be employed by him on the like kind errand to those whom he styles his brethren? Can we believe that he who once *bore our griefs, and carried our sorrows*, will, from that height of glory to which he is now exalted, look down upon us here, contending with the storm of adversity, labouring to follow his steps through the steep and difficult paths of virtue, exposed on every side to arrows aimed against us by the powers of darkness and that, seeing our distress and hearing our supplications, he will remain an unconcerned spectator, without vouchsafing us either assistance to support our frailty, or protection to screen us amidst surrounding dangers? Where were then the benevolence of a divine Nature? Where, the compassion of that Mediator who was trained to mercy in the school of sorrow? Far from us be such ungrateful suspicions of the generous friend of human kind!—Let us exert ourselves as we can, and we shall be assisted. Let us pray, and we shall be heard; for there is one to present our prayers, whom *the Father heareth always*. These, will he say, are my followers on earth, passing through that thorny path of temptation and sorrow which I once trod. *Now I am no more in the world; but these are in the world. Holy Father! thine they were, and thou gavest them me. Keep them through thine own name. Sanctify them through thy truth. Keep them from the evil one; that they may be where I am, and may behold the glory which thou hast given me.*†

Such is the comfort which arises to us from our Saviour's participation of the infirmities of human nature; and thus it may be applied to various situations of anxiety and distress.

WHEN we review what has been said, it is necessary that, in the

* Luke, xxii. 43.

† John, xvii.

first place, I guard you against a certain misimprovement which may be made of this doctrine. The amiable view which it gives of our Lord's clemency, may flatter some men with unwarrantable hopes, and lead them to imagine, that in his experience of human weakness an apology is to be found for every crime. Persons of this character must be taught, that his compassion differs widely from that undistinguishing and capricious indulgence which is sometimes found among men. It is the compassion of an impartial mind, enlightened by wisdom, and guided by justice, extending to the frailties of the sincere, but not to the sins of the presumptuous, and least of all to the crimes of those who encourage themselves in evil from the hope that they shall meet with compassion.

A course of deliberate guilt admits of no apology from the weakness of human nature. For, notwithstanding all the infirmities incident to it, no man is under a necessity of being wicked. So far is our Saviour's experience of our nature from affording any ground of hope to presumptuous offenders, that it ought to fill them with terror. For it shows them how thoroughly qualified he is to discriminate accurately the characters of men, and to mark the boundaries between frailty and perverseness. He who from his own feelings well knows all the workings of the human heart, clearly discerns how different their temper is from what was once his own. He perceives that vice, not virtue, is their choice; and that, instead of resisting temptation, they resist conscience. He sees that infirmity affords them no excuse; and that the real cause of their acting a criminal part, is not because they cannot do better, but, in truth, because they will not. Having forfeited every title to compassion, they are left in the hands of justice; and according as *they have sown*, they must expect to *reap*.

But, in the next place, to such as are sincere and upright, the doctrine which I have illustrated affords high encouragement, and powerfully recommends the Christian religion. It places that religion in its proper point of view, as a medicinal plan, intended both for the recovery of mankind from guilt, and for their consolation under trouble. *The law was given by Moses; but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.* The law was a dispensation of mere authority. The Gospel is a dispensation, not of authority only, but of relief. If it discovers new duties and imposes new obligations, it opens also sources of comfort which were before unknown to the world.

A Mediator between God and his creatures, was an object after which men in all nations, and under all forms of religion, had long and anxiously sought. The follies of superstition have served to disclose to us, in this instance, the sentiments of nature. The whole religion of Paganism was a system of mediation and intercession. Depressed by a conscious sense of guilt, nature shrunk at the thought of adventuring on a direct approach to the Sovereign of the universe; and laboured to find out some auspicious introducer to that awful presence. With blind and trembling eagerness the nations fled to subordinate deities, to tutelar gods, and to departed spirits, as their patrons and advocates above. Then they studied to sooth with such costly gifts, such pompous rites, or such humble supplications, as they

thought might incline them to favour their cause, and to support their interest with the Supreme Divinity. While mankind were bewildered in this darkness, the Gospel not only revealed the true Mediator, who in this view may be justly called *the desire of all nations*; but placed his character and office in a light most admirably fitted, as has been shown in this discourse, to support the interest of virtue in the world; and to encourage the humble, without flattering the presumptuous. What plan of religion could be more suited to the circumstances of man, or more worthy of the goodness of his Creator? What more animating to the pious worshipper, in performing those solemn acts of devotion to which we are called by the service of this day?

I CANNOT conclude without taking notice how remarkably the dispensation of religion is calculated to promote a spirit of humanity and compassion among men, by those very means which it employs for inspiring devotion towards God. We are now drawing nigh to the Supreme Being through a Mediator, for whose compassion we pray, on account of the experience which he has had of our frailty. We trust, that having been acquainted with distress, he *will not despise nor abhor the affliction of the afflicted*. The argument by which we plead for his compassion, concludes still more strongly for mutual charity, and sympathy with one another. He who, in the midst of the common sufferings of life, feels not for the distressed; he who relents not at his neighbour's griefs, nor scans his failings with the eye of a brother, must be sensible that he excludes himself from the commiseration of Christ. He makes void the argument by which he pleads for his mercy; nay, he establishes a precedent against himself. Thus the Christian religion approves itself as worthy of God, by connecting devotion in strict union with charity. As in its precepts the love of God and the love of man are joined, so in its institutions the exercise of both is called forth; and to worship God through the mediation of a compassionate High Priest, necessarily supposes in the worshippers a spirit of compassion towards their own brethren.

SERMON XXI.

ON THE LOVE OF PRAISE.

JOHN, xii. 43.

For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.

THE state of man on earth is manifestly designed for the trial of his virtue. Temptations every-where occur; and perpetual vigilance and attention are required. There is no passion, or principle of action in his nature, which may not, if left to itself, betray him into some criminal excess. Corruption gains entrance, not only by those passions which are apparently of dangerous tendency, such as covetousness, and love of pleasure; but by means of those also which are seemingly the most fair and innocent, such as the desire of esteem and praise.

Of this the Text suggests a remarkable instance. When our Lord appeared in the land of Judea, the purity of his doctrine, and the evidence of his miracles, procured him a considerable number of followers, chiefly among the lower classes of men. But the Pharisees, who were the leading and fashionable sect, galled with the freedom of his reproofs, decried him as an impostor. Hence it came to pass, that though *some of the rulers believed in him, yet, because of the Pharisees, they did not confess him.* Rulers, persons who, by their rank and education, ought to have been superiour to any popular prejudice, were so far overawed by the opinions of others, as to stifle their conviction, to dissemble their faith, and to join with the prevailing party, in condemning one whom in their hearts they revered: for which this reason is given, that *they loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God.* Since, then, the love of praise can mislead men into such culpable and dishonest conduct, let us, with some attention, examine the nature of this passion. Let us consider how far it is an allowable principle of action; when it begins to be criminal; and upon what accounts we ought to guard against its acquiring the entire ascendant.

We are intended by Providence to be connected with one another in society. Single unassisted individuals could make small advances towards any valuable improvement. By means of society our wants are supplied, and our lives rendered comfortable; our capacities are enlarged, and our virtuous affections called forth into proper exercise. In order to confirm our mutual connexion, it was necessary that some attracting power, which had the effect of drawing men together, and strengthening the social ties, should pervade the human system. Nothing could more happily fulfil this purpose, than our being so formed as to desire the esteem, and to delight in the good opinion, of each other. Had such a propensity been wanting, and selfish principles left to occupy its place, society must have proved an unharmonious and discordant state. Instead of mutual attraction, a repulsive power would have prevailed. Among men who had no regard to the approbation of one another, all intercourse would have been jarring and offensive. For the wisest ends, therefore, the desire of praise was made an original and powerful principle in the human breast.

To a variety of good purposes it is subservient, and on many occasions co-operates with the principle of virtue. It awakens us from sloth, invigorates activity, and stimulates our efforts to excel. It has given rise to most of the splendid, and to many of the useful enterprises of men. It has animated the patriot, and fired the hero. Magnanimity, generosity, and fortitude are what all mankind admire. Hence such as were actuated by the desire of extensive fame, have been prompted to deeds which either participated of the spirit, or, at least, carried the appearance of distinguished virtue. The desire of praise is generally connected with all the finer sensibilities of human nature. It affords a ground on which exhortation, counsel, and reproof, can work a proper effect. Whereas to be entirely destitute of this passion, betokens an ignoble mind, on which no moral impression is easily made. Where there is no desire of praise, there will be also no sense of reproach; and if that be extinguished, one of the

principal guards of virtue is removed, and the path opened to many opprobrious pursuits. He whose countenance never glistened with shame, and whose heart never beat at the sound of praise, is not destined for any honourable distinction; is likely to grovel in the sordid quest of gain, or to slumber life away in the indolence of selfish pleasures.

Abstracting from the sentiments which are connected with the love of praise as a principle of action, the esteem of our fellow-creatures is an object which, on account of the advantages it brings, may be lawfully pursued. It is necessary to our success in every fair and honest undertaking. Not only our private interest, but our public usefulness, depends in a great measure upon it. The sphere of our influence is contracted or enlarged in proportion to the degree in which we enjoy the good opinion of the public. Men listen with an unwilling ear to one whom they do not honour; while a respected character adds weight to example, and authority to counsel. To desire the esteem of others for the sake of its effects, is not only allowable, but in many cases is our duty; and to be totally indifferent to praise or censure, is so far from being a virtue, that it is a real defect in character.

BUT while the love of praise is admitted to be a natural, and, in so many respects, an useful principle of action, we are to observe, that it is entitled to no more than our secondary regard. It has its boundary set; by transgressing which, it is at once transformed from an innocent into a most dangerous passion. More sacred and venerable principles claim the chief direction of human conduct. All the good effects which we have ascribed to the desire of praise, are produced by it when remaining in a subordinate station. But when, passing its natural line, it becomes the ruling spring of conduct; when the regard which we pay to the opinions of men, encroaches on that reverence which we owe to the voice of conscience and the sense of duty; the love of praise having then gone out of its proper place, instead of improving, corrupts; and instead of elevating, debases our nature. The proportion which this passion holds to other principles of action, is what renders it either innocent or criminal. The crime with which the Jewish rulers are charged in the Text, was not that they loved the praise of men; but that they loved it *more than the praise of God*.

Even in cases where there is no direct competition between our duty and our fancied honour, between the praise of men and the praise of God, the passion for applause may become criminal, by occupying the place of a better principle. When vain-glory usurps the throne of virtue; when ostentation produces actions which conscience ought to have dictated; such actions, however specious, have no claim to moral or religious praise. We know that good deeds, done merely to be seen of men, lose their reward with God. If, on occasion of some trying conjuncture, which makes us hesitate concerning our line of conduct, the first question which occurs to us be, not whether an action is right in itself, and such as a good man ought to perform, but whether it is such as will find acceptance with the world, and be

favourable to our fame, the conclusion is too evident, that the desire of applause has obtained an undue ascendant. What a wise and good man ought to study, is to preserve his mind free from any such solicitude concerning praise, as may be in hazard of overcoming his sense of duty. The approbation of men he may wish to obtain, as far as is consistent with the approbation of God. But when both cannot be enjoyed together, there ought to be no suspense. He is to retire, contented with the testimony of a good conscience; and to show, by the firmness of his behaviour, that, in the cause of truth and virtue, he is superiour to all opinion. — Let us now proceed to consider the arguments which should support such a spirit, and guard us against the improper influence of praise or censure in the course of our duty.

In the first place, The praise of men is not an object of such value in itself, as to be entitled to become the leading principle of conduct. We degrade our character, when we allow it more than subordinate regard. Like other worldly goods, it is apt to dazzle us with a false lustre; but if we would ascertain its true worth, let us reflect both on whom it is bestowed, and from whom it proceeds. Were the applause of the world always the reward of merit; were it appropriated to such alone as by real abilities, or by worthy actions, are entitled to rise above the crowd, we might justly be flattered by possessing a rare and valuable distinction. But, how far is this from being the case in fact? How often have the despicable and the vile, by dexterously catching the favour of the multitude, soared upon the wings of popular applause, while the virtuous and the deserving have been either buried in obscurity, or obliged to encounter the attacks of unjust reproach? The laurels which human praise confers, are withered and blasted by the unworthiness of those who wear them. Let the man who is vain of public favour be humbled, by the reflection that, in the midst of his success, he is mingled with a crowd of impostors and deceivers, of hypocrites and enthusiasts, of ignorant pretenders and superficial reasoners, who, by various arts, have attained as high a rank as himself in temporary fame.

We may easily be satisfied that applause will be often shared by the undeserving, if we allow ourselves to consider from whom it proceeds. When it is the approbation of the wise only, and the good, which is pursued, the love of praise may then be accounted to contain itself within just bounds, and to run in its proper channel. But the testimony of the discerning few, modest and unassuming as they commonly are, forms but a small part of the public voice. It seldom amounts to more than a whisper, which amidst the general clamour is drowned. When the love of praise has taken possession of the mind, it confines not itself to an object so limited. It grows into an appetite for indiscriminate praise. And who are they that confer this praise? A mixed multitude of men, who in their whole conduct are guided by humour and caprice, far more than by reason; who admire false appearances, and pursue false gods; who inquire superficially, and judge rashly; whose sentiments are for the most part erroneous, always changeable, and often inconsistent. Nor let any

one imagine, that by looking above the crowd, and courting the praise of the fashionable and the great, he makes sure of true honour. There ~~are~~ a great vulgar, as well as a small. Rank often ~~makes~~ no difference in the understandings of men, or in their judicious distribution of praise. Luxury, pride, and vanity, have frequently as much influence in corrupting the sentiments of the great, as ignorance, bigotry, and prejudice, have in misleading the opinions of the crowd. — And is it to such judges as these that you submit the supreme direction of your conduct? Do you stoop to court their favour as your chief distinction, when an object of so much juster and higher ambition is presented to you *in the praise of God*? God is the only unerring Judge of what is excellent. His approbation alone is the substance, all other praise is but the shadow, of honour. The character which you bear in his sight, is your only real one. How contemptible does it render you, to be indifferent with respect to this, and to be solicitous about a name alone, a fictitious, imaginary character, which has no existence except in the opinions of a few weak and credulous men around you? They see no farther than the outside of things. They can judge of you by actions only; and not by the comprehensive view of all your actions, but by such merely as you have had opportunity of bringing forth to public notice. But the Sovereign of the world beholds you in every light in which you can be placed. The silent virtues of a generous purpose, and a pious heart, attract his notice, equally with the most splendid deeds. From him you may reap the praise of good actions which you had no opportunity of performing. For he sees them in their principle; he judges of you by your intentions; he knows what you would have done. You may be in his eyes a hero or a martyr, without undergoing the labours of the one, or the sufferings of the other. His inspection, therefore, opens a much wider field for praise, than what the world can afford you; and for praise, too, certainly far more illustrious in the eye of reason. Every real artist studies to approve himself to such as are knowing in his art. To their judgment he appeals. On their approbation he rests his character, and not on the praise of the unskilled and rude. In the highest art of all, that of life and conduct, shall the opinions of ignorant men come into the most distant competition with his approbation, who is the searcher of all hearts, and the standard of all perfection? — The testimony of his praise is not indeed, as yet, openly bestowed. But though the voice of the Almighty sound not in your ears, yet by conscience, his sacred vicegerent, it is capable of being conveyed to your heart. The softest whisper of divine approbation is sweeter to the soul of a virtuous man, than the loudest shouts of that tumultuary applause which proceeds from the world.

Consider, farther, how narrow and circumscribed in its limits that fame is, which the vain-glorious man so eagerly pursues. In order to show him this, I shall not bid him reflect that it is confined to a small district of the earth; and that when he looks a little beyond the region which he inhabits, he will find himself as much unknown as the most obscure person around him. I shall not desire him to

consider, that in the gulf of oblivion, where all human memorials are swallowed up, his name and fame must soon be inevitably lost. He may imagine that ample honours remain to gratify ambition, though his reputation extend not over the whole globe, nor last till the end of time. But let him calmly reflect, that within the narrow boundaries of that country to which he belongs, and during that small portion of time which his life fills up, his reputation, great as he may fancy it to be, occupies no more than an inconsiderable corner. Let him think what multitudes of those among whom he dwells, are totally ignorant of his name and character; how many imagine themselves too important to regard him; how many are too much occupied with their own wants and pursuits, to pay him the least attention; and where his reputation is in any degree spread, how often it has been attacked, and how many rivals are daily rising to abate it: Having attended to these circumstances, he will find sufficient materials for humiliation in the midst of the highest applause. — From all these considerations it clearly appears, that though the esteem of our fellow-creatures be pleasing, and the pursuit of it, in a moderate degree, be fair and lawful, yet that it affords no such object to desire, as entitles it to be a ruling principle.

In the second place, An excessive love of praise never fails to undermine the regard due to conscience, and to corrupt the heart. It turns off the eye of the mind from the ends which it ought chiefly to keep in view; and sets up a false light for its guide. Its influence is the more dangerous, as the colour which it assumes is often fair; and its garb and appearance are nearly allied to that of virtue. The love of glory, I before admitted, may give birth to actions which are both splendid and useful. At a distance, they strike the eye with uncommon brightness; but, on a nearer and stricter survey, their lustre is often tarnished. They are found to want that sacred and venerable dignity which characterises true virtue. Little passions and selfish interests entered into the motives of those who performed them. They were jealous of a competitor. They sought to humble a rival. They looked round for spectators to admire them. All is magnanimity, generosity, and courage, to public view. But the ignoble source whence these seeming virtues take their rise, is hidden. Without, appears the hero; within, is found the man of dust and clay. Consult such as have been intimately connected with the followers of renown; and seldom or never will you find that they held them in the same esteem with those who viewed them from afar. There is nothing, except simplicity of intention, and purity of principle, that can stand the test of near approach and strict examination.

But, supposing the virtue of vain-glorious men not to be always false, it certainly cannot be depended upon as firm or sure. Constancy and steadiness are to be looked for from him only whose conduct is regulated by a sense of what is right; *whose praise is not of men, but of God*; whose motive to discharge his duty is always the same. Change as much as you please, the situation of such a man; let applause or let censure be his lot; let the public voice, which this day has extolled him, to-morrow as loudly decry him; on the tenour

of his behaviour these changes produce no effect. He moves in a higher sphere. As the sun in his orbit is not interrupted by the mists and storms of the atmosphere below; so, regardless of the opinions of men, *through honour and dishonour, through good report and bad report*, he pursues the path which conscience has marked out. Whereas the apparent virtues of that man whose eye is fixed on the world, are precarious and temporary. Supported only by circumstances, occasions, and particular regards, they fluctuate and fall with these. Excited by public admiration, they disappear when it is withdrawn; like those exhalations which, raised by heat from the earth, glitter in the air with momentary splendour, and then fall back to the ground from whence they sprang.

The intemperate love of praise not only weakens the true principles of probity, by substituting inferior motives in their stead, but frequently also impels men to actions which are directly criminal. It obliges them to follow the current of popular opinion whithersoever it may carry them; and hence *shipwreck* is often made both of *faith and of a good conscience*. According as circumstances lead them to court the acclamations of the multitude, or to pursue the applause of the great, vices of different kinds will stain their character. In one situation, they will make hypocritical professions of religion. In another, they will be ashamed of their Redeemer, and of his words. They will be afraid to appear in their own form, or to utter their genuine sentiments. Their whole character will become fictitious, opinions will be assumed, speech and behaviour modelled, and even the countenance formed, as prevailing taste exacts. From one who has submitted to such prostitution for the sake of praise, you can no longer expect fidelity or attachment on any trying occasion. In private life, he will be a timorous and treacherous friend. In public conduct, he will be supple and versatile; ready to desert the cause which he had espoused, and to veer with every shifting wind of popular favour. In fine, all becomes unsound and hollow in that heart, where, instead of regard to the divine approbation, there reigns the sovereign desire of pleasing men.

In the third place, This passion, when it becomes predominant, most commonly defeats its own end, and deprives men of the honour which they are so eager to gain. Without preserving liberty and independence, we can never command respect. That servility of spirit which subjects us to the opinion of others, and renders us tributaries to the world for the sake of applause, is what all mankind despise. They look up with reverence to one who, unawed by their censures, acts according to his own sense of things, and follows the free impulse of an honourable mind. But him who hangs totally on their judgment, they consider as their vassal. They even enjoy a malignant pleasure in humbling his vanity, and withholding that praise which he is seen to court. By artifice and show, he may shine for a time in the public eye; but it is only as long as he can support the belief of acting from principle. When the inconsistencies into which he falls detect his character, his reputation passes away like the pageant of a day. No man ever obtained lasting fame,

who did not, on several occasions, contradict the prejudices of popular opinion.

There is no course of behaviour which will at all times please all men. That which pleases most generally, and which only commands durable praise, is religion and virtue. Sincere piety towards God, kind affection to men, and fidelity in the discharge of all the duties of life; a conscience pure and undefiled; a heart firm to justice and to truth, superiour to all terrors that would shake, and insensible of all pleasures that would betray it; unconquerable by the opposition of the world, and resigned to God alone: these are the qualities which render a man truly respectable and great. Such a character may, in evil times, incur unjust reproach. But the clouds which envy or prejudice has gathered around it, will gradually disperse; and its brightness will come forth, in the end, as the noon-day. As soon as it is thoroughly known, it finds a witness in every breast. It forces approbation even from the most degenerate. The human heart is so formed as to be attuned, if we may use the expression, to its praise. In fact, it is this firm and inflexible virtue, this determined regard to principle beyond all opinion, which has crowned the characters of such as now stand highest in the rolls of lasting fame. The truly illustrious are they who did not court the praise of the world, but who performed the actions which deserved it. They were perhaps traduced in their life-time by those whom they opposed. But posterity has done them ample justice; and they are the men whom the voice of ages now concurs in celebrating. *The memorial of virtue is immortal; because it is approved of God and of men. When it is present, men take example at it; and when it is gone, they desire it. It weareth a crown, and triumpheth for ever; having gotten the victory; striving for undefiled rewards.**

In the fourth place, As an immoderate passion for human praise is dangerous to virtue, and unfavourable to true honour; so it is destructive of self-enjoyment and inward peace. Regard to the praise of God prescribes a simple and consistent tenour of conduct, which in all situations is the same; which engages us in no perplexities, and requires no artful refinement. *Walking uprightly, we walk surely*, because we tread an even and open path. But he who turns aside from the straight road of duty, in order to gain applause, involves himself in an intricate labyrinth. He will be often embarrassed concerning the course which he ought to hold. His mind will be always on the stretch. He will be obliged to listen with anxious attention to every whisper of the popular voice. The demands of those masters whom he has submitted to serve, will prove frequently contradictory and inconsistent. He has prepared a yoke for his neck, which he must resolve to bear, how much soever it may gall him.

The toils of virtue are honourable. The mind is supported under them by the consciousness of acting a right and becoming part. But the labours to which he is doomed who is enslaved to the desire of praise, are aggravated by reflection both on the uncertainty of the recompence which he pursues, and on the debasement to which he

* Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 1, 2.

submits. Conscience will, from time to time, remind him of the improper sacrifices which he has made, and of the forfeiture which he has incurred, of the praise of God for the sake of praise from men. Suppose him to receive all the rewards which the mistaken opinion of the world can bestow, its loudest applause will often be unable to drown the upbraidings of an inward voice; and if a man is reduced to be ashamed of himself, what avails it him to be caressed by others?

But, in truth, the reward towards which he looks who proposes human praise as his ultimate object, will be always flying, like a shadow, before him. So capricious and uncertain, so fickle and mutable, is the favour of the multitude, that it proves the most unsatisfactory of all pursuits in which men can be engaged. He who sets his heart on it, is preparing for himself perpetual mortifications. If the greatest and best can seldom retain it long, we may easily believe, that from the vain and undeserving it will suddenly escape. There is no character but what on some side is vulnerable by censure. He who lifts himself up to the observation and notice of the world, is, of all men, the least likely to avoid it. For he draws upon himself a thousand eyes, that will narrowly inspect him in every part. Every opportunity will be watched, of bringing him down to the common level. His errors will be more divulged, and his infirmities more magnified, than those of others. In proportion to his eagerness for praise, will be his sensibility to reproach. Nor is it reproach alone that will wound him. He will be as much dejected by silence and neglect. He puts himself under the power of every one to humble him, by withholding expected praise. Even when praise is bestowed, he is mortified by its being either faint or trite. He pines when his reputation stagnates. The degree of applause to which he has been accustomed, grows insipid; and to be always praised from the same topics, becomes at last much the same with not being praised at all.

All these chagrins and inquietudes are happily avoided by him who keeps so troublesome a passion within its due bounds; who is more desirous of being truly worthy, than of being thought so; who pursues the praise of the world with manly temperance, and in subordination to the praise of God. He is neither made giddy by the intoxicating vapour of applause, nor humbled and cast down by the unmerited attacks of censure. Resting on a higher approbation, he enjoys himself, in peace, whether human praise stays with him, or flies away. *With me it is a small thing to be judged of you, or of man's judgment. He that judgeth me is the Lord. My witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.*

In the fifth and last place, The advantages which redound from the praise of men, are not such as can bear to be put in competition with those which flow from the praise of God. The former are necessarily confined within the verge of our present existence. The latter follow us beyond the grave, and extend through all eternity. Not only is the praise of men limited in its effects to this life, but also to particular situations of it. In the days of health and ease, it may brighten the sunshine of prosperity. It may then sooth the ear with pleasing accents, and gratify the imagination with fancied triumphs.

But when the distressful seasons of life arrive, it will be found altogether hollow and unsubstantial; and surely, the value of any possession is to be chiefly estimated by the relief which it can bring us, in the time of our greatest need. When the mind is cast down with sorrow and grief, when sickness spreads its gloom around us, or death rises in awful prospect to our view, the opinions and the discourses of the world will appear trifling and insignificant. To one who is occupied with nearer and more affecting interests, the praise or the censure of the world will seem like the noise of distant voices, in which he has small concern. But then is the season when the praise of God supports and upholds the labouring soul. Brought home to the heart by the testimony of a good conscience, and by the *divine Spirit bearing witness with our spirits*, it inspires fortitude, and produces a *peace which passeth understanding*.

At present, we behold an irregular and disordered state of things. Virtue is often deprived of its proper honours, and vice usurps them in its stead. The characters of men are mistaken; and ignorance and folly dispose of human applause. But the day hastens apace, which shall close this scene of errors, and vindicate the rights of justice and truth. *Then shall be rendered to every man according to his works*. Envy shall no longer have the power of obscuring merit, nor popular prejudices be able to support the undeserving. Hidden worth shall be brought to light, and secret crimes revealed. Many who passed through the world in the silent obscurity of humble but steady goodness, shall be distinguished as the favourites of Heaven; while the proud, the ambitious, and the vain, are left to everlasting dishonour. The great Judge hath declared, that *whosoever hath been ashamed of him and of his words, of that man shall he be ashamed when he cometh in the glory of his Father, with all the holy angels*. Every departure from duty shall, at the period of final retribution, terminate in ignominy. True honour and true virtue shall be seen to coincide; and when all human fame has passed away like smoke, the only praise which shall be for ever remembered is that divine testimony, *Well done, thou good and faithful servant; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord*.

THESE arguments clearly show the importance of preserving the love of praise under proper subordination to the principle of duty. In itself, it is an useful motive to action; but when allowed to extend its influence too far, it corrupts the whole character, and produces guilt, disgrace, and misery. To be entirely destitute of it, is a defect. To be governed by it, is depravity. The proper adjustment of the several principles of action in human nature, is a matter that deserves our highest attention. For when any one of them becomes either too weak or too strong, it endangers both our virtue and our happiness. *Keep thy heart therefore with all diligence; pray that God would enable thee to keep it with success; for out of the heart are the issues of life*.

XXII.

ON THE PROPER ESTIMATE OF HUMAN LIFE,

ECCLESIASTES, xii. 8.

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, all is vanity.

No serious maxim has been more generally adopted, than that of the Text. In every age, the vanity of human life has been the theme of declamation, and the subject of complaint. It is a conclusion in which men of all characters and ranks, the high and the low, the young and the old, the religious and the worldly, have more frequently concurred, than in any other. But how just soever the conclusion may be, the premises which lead to it are often false. For it is prompted by various motives, and derived from very different views of things. Sometimes the language of the Text is assumed by a sceptic, who cavils at Providence, and censures the constitution of the world. Sometimes it is the complaint of a peevish man, who is discontented with his station, and ruffled by the disappointment of unreasonable hopes. Sometimes it is the style of the licentious, when groaning under miseries in which their vices have involved them. Invectives against the vanity of the world which come from any of these quarters deserve no regard; as they are the dictates of impiety, of spleen, or of folly. The only case in which the sentiment of the Text claims our attention is, when uttered, not as an aspersion on Providence, or a reflection on human affairs in general; not as the language of private discontent, or the result of guilty sufferings; but as the sober conclusion of a wise and good man, concerning the imperfection of that happiness which rests solely on worldly pleasures. These, in their fairest form, are not what they seem to be. They never bestow that complete satisfaction which they promise; and therefore he who looks to nothing beyond them, shall have frequent cause to deplore their vanity.

Nothing is of higher importance to us, as men and as Christians, than to form a proper estimate of human life, without either loading it with imaginary evils, or expecting from it greater advantages than it is able to yield. It shall be my business, therefore, in this Discourse, to distinguish a just and religious sense of the vanity of the world, from the unreasonable complaints of it which we often hear. I shall endeavour, I. To show in what sense it is true that all earthly pleasures are vanity. II. To inquire, how this vanity of the world can be reconciled with the perfections of its great Author. III. To examine, whether there are not some real and solid enjoyments in human life, which fall not under this general charge of vanity. And, IV. To point out the proper improvement to be made of such a state as the life of man shall appear on the whole to be.

I. I AM to show, in what sense it is true that all human pleasures are vanity. This is a topic which might be embellished with the pomp of much description. But I shall studiously avoid exaggeration, and only point out a threefold vanity in human life, which every impartial

observer cannot but admit; disappointment in pursuit, dissatisfaction in enjoyment, uncertainty in possession.

First, Disappointment in pursuit. When we look around us on the world, we every-where behold a busy multitude, intent on the prosecution of various designs which their wants or desires have suggested. We behold them employing every method which ingenuity can devise, some the patience of industry, some the boldness of enterprise, others the dexterity of stratagem, in order to compass their ends. Of this incessant stir and activity, what is the fruit? In comparison of the crowd who have toiled in vain, how small is the number of the successful? Or rather, where is the man who will declare, that in every point he has completed his plan, and attained his utmost wish? No extent of human abilities has been able to discover a path, which, in any line of life, leads unerringly to success. *The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor riches to men of understanding.* We may form our plans with the most profound sagacity, and with the most vigilant caution may guard against dangers on every side. But some unforeseen occurrence comes across, which baffles our wisdom, and lays our labours in the dust.

Were such disappointments confined to those who aspire at engrossing the higher departments of life, the misfortune would be less. The humiliation of the mighty, and the fall of ambition from its towering height, little concern the bulk of mankind. These are objects on which, as on distant meteors, they gaze from afar, without drawing personal instruction from events so much above them. But, alas! when we descend into the regions of private life, we find disappointment and blasted hope equally prevalent there. Neither the moderation of our views, nor the justice of our pretensions, can ensure success. *But time and chance happen to all.* Against the stream of events, both the worthy and the undeserving are obliged to struggle; and both are frequently overborne alike by the current.

BESIDES disappointment in pursuit, dissatisfaction in enjoyment is a farther vanity to which the human state is subject. This is the severest of all mortifications; after having been successful in the pursuit, to be baffled in the enjoyment itself. Yet this is found to be an evil still more general than the former. Some may be so fortunate as to attain what they have pursued; but none are rendered completely happy by what they have attained. Disappointed hope is misery; and yet successful hope is only imperfect bliss. Look through all the ranks of mankind. Examine the condition of those who appear most prosperous; and you will find that they are never just what they desire to be. If retired, they languish for action; if busy, they complain of fatigue. If in middle life, they are impatient for distinction; if in high stations, they sigh after freedom and ease. Something is still wanting to that plenitude of satisfaction which they expected to acquire. Together with every wish that is gratified, a new demand arises. One void opens in the heart, as another is filled. On wishes, wishes grow; and to the end, it is rather the expectation of what they have not, than the enjoyment of what they have, which occupies and interests the most successful.

This dissatisfaction, in the midst of human pleasure, springs partly from the nature of our enjoyments themselves, and partly from circumstances which corrupt them. No worldly enjoyments are adequate to the high desires and powers of an immortal spirit. Fancy paints them at a distance with splendid colours; but possession unveils the fallacy. The eagerness of passion bestows upon them at first a brisk and lively relish. But it is their fate always to pull by familiarity, and sometimes to pass from satiety into disgust. Happy would the poor man think himself if he could enter on all the treasures of the rich; and happy for a short while he might be; but before he had long contemplated and admired his state, his possessions would seem to lessen, and his cares would grow.

Add to the unsatisfying nature of our pleasures, the attending circumstances which never fail to corrupt them. For, such as they are, they are at no time possessed unmixed. To human lips it is not given to taste the cup of pure joy. When external circumstances show fairest to the world, the envied man groans in private under his own burden. Some vexation disquiets, some passion corrodes him; some distress, either felt or feared, gnaws, like a worm, the root of his felicity. When there is nothing from without to disturb the prosperous, a secret poison operates within. For worldly happiness ever tends to destroy itself, by corrupting the heart. It fosters the loose and the violent passions. It engenders noxious habits; and taints the mind with a false delicacy, which makes it feel a thousand unreal evils.

BUT put the case in the most favourable light. Lay aside from human pleasures both disappointment in pursuit, and deceitfulness in enjoyment; suppose them to be fully attainable, and completely satisfactory; still there remains to be considered the vanity of uncertain possession and short duration. Were there in worldly things any fixed point of security which we could gain, the mind would then have some basis on which to rest. But our condition is such, that every thing wavers and totters around us. *Boast not thyself of tomorrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* It is much if, during its course, thou hearest not of somewhat to disquiet or alarm thee. For life never proceeds long in an uniform train. It is continually varied by unexpected events. The seeds of alteration are every-where sown; and the sunshine of prosperity commonly accelerates their growth. If your enjoyments be numerous, you lie more open on different sides to be wounded. If you have possessed them long, you have greater cause to dread an approaching change. By slow degrees prosperity rises; but rapid is the progress of evil. It requires no preparation to bring it forward. The edifice which it costs much time and labour to erect, one inauspicious event, one sudden blow, can level with the dust. Even supposing the accidents of life to leave us untouched, human bliss must still be transitory; for man changes of himself. No course of enjoyment can delight us long. What amused our youth, loses its charm in maturer age. As years advance, our powers are blunted, and our pleasurable feelings decline. The silent lapse of time is ever carrying somewhat from us,

till at length the period comes when ~~all~~ must be swept away. The prospect of this termination of our labours and pursuits is sufficient to mark our state with vanity. *Our days are a hand-breadth, and our age is as nothing.* Within that little space is all our enterprise bounded. We crowd it with toils and care, with contention and strife. We project great designs, entertain high hopes, and then leave our plans unfinished, and sink into oblivion.

Thus much let it suffice to have said concerning the vanity of the world. That too much has not been said, must appear to every one who considers how generally mankind lean to the opposite side; and how often, by undue attachment to the present state, they both feed the most sinful passions, *and pierce themselves through with many sorrows.* Let us proceed to inquire,

II. How this vanity of the world can be reconciled with the perfections of its divine Author. This inquiry involves that great difficulty which has perplexed the thoughtful and serious in every age: If God be good, whence the evil that fills the earth? In answer to this interesting question, let us observe,

In the first place, That the present condition of man was not his original or primary state. We are informed by divine revelation, that it is the consequence of his voluntary apostacy from God and a state of innocence. By this, his nature was corrupted; his powers were enfeebled; and vanity and vexation introduced into his life. All nature became involved in the condemnation of man. The earth was cursed upon his account, and the whole creation made to *groan and travail in pain.*

How mysterious soever the account of this fall may appear to us, many circumstances concur to authenticate the fact, and to show that human nature and the human state have undergone an unhappy change. The belief of this has obtained in almost all nations and religions. It can be traced through all the fables of antiquity. An obscure tradition appears to have pervaded the whole earth, that man is not now what he was at first; but that in consequence of some transgression against his great Lord, a state of degradation and exile succeeded to a condition that was more flourishing and happy. As our nature carries plain marks of perversion and disorder, so the world which we inhabit bears the symptoms of having been convulsed in all its frame. Naturalists point out to us every-where the traces of some violent change which it has suffered. Islands torn from the continent, burning mountains, shattered precipices, uninhabitable wastes, give it all the appearance of a mighty ruin. The physical and moral state of man in this world mutually sympathize and correspond. They indicate not a regular and orderly structure, either of matter or of mind, but the remains of somewhat that was once more fair and magnificent. Let us observe,

In the second place, That as this was not the original, so it is not intended to be the final, state of man. Though, in consequence of the abuse of the human powers, sin and vanity were introduced into this region of the universe, it was not the purpose of the Creator that they should be permitted to reign for ever. He hath made ample

provision for the recovery of the penitent and faithful part of his subjects, by the merciful undertaking of that great Restorer of the world, our Lord Jesus Christ. By him *life and immortality were both purchased and brought to light. The new heavens and the new earth are discovered, wherein dwelleth righteousness*; where, through the divine grace, human nature shall regain its original honours, and man shall return to be what once he was in Paradise. Through those high discoveries of the Gospel, this life appears to good men only in the light of an intermediate and preparatory state. Its vanity and misery, in a manner, disappear. They have every reason to submit without complaint to its laws, and to wait in patience till the appointed time come for the *restitution of all things*. Let us take notice,

IN the third place, That a future state being made known, we can account in a satisfying manner for the present distress of human life, without the smallest impeachment of divine goodness. The sufferings we here undergo are converted into discipline and improvement. Through the blessing of Heaven, good is extracted from apparent evil; and the very misery which originated from sin, is rendered the means of correcting sinful passions, and preparing us for felicity. There is much reason to believe that creatures as imperfect as we are, require some such preliminary state of experience before they can recover the perfection of their nature. It is in the midst of disappointments and trials that we learn the insufficiency of temporal things to happiness, and are taught to seek it from God and Virtue. By these the violence of our passions is tamed, and our minds are formed to sobriety and reflection. In the varieties of life, occasioned by the vicissitude of worldly fortune, we are inured to habits both of the active and the suffering virtues. How much soever we complain of the vanity of the world, facts plainly show, that if its vanity were less, it could not answer the purpose of salutary discipline. Unsatisfactory as it is, its pleasures are still too apt to corrupt our hearts. How fatal then must the consequences have been, had it yielded us more complete enjoyment? If, with all its troubles, we are in danger of being too much attached to it, how entirely would it have seduced our affections, if no troubles had been mingled with its pleasures?

These observations serve in a great measure to obviate the difficulties which arise from the apparent vanity of the human state, by showing how, upon the Christian system, that vanity may be reconciled with the infinite goodness of the Sovereign of the universe. The present condition of man is not that for which he was originally designed; it is not to be his final state; and during his passage through the world, the distresses which he undergoes are rendered medicinal and improving. After having taken this view of things, the cloud, which in the preceding part of the Discourse appeared to sit so thick upon human life, begins to be dissipated. We now perceive that man is not abandoned by his Creator. We discern great and good designs going on in his behalf. We are allowed to entertain better hopes; and are encouraged to inquire, as was proposed for the

III^d HEAD of discourse, Whether there be not, in the present condition of human life, some real and solid enjoyments which come

not under the general charge of *vanity of vanities*. The doctrine of the Text is to be considered as chiefly addressed to worldly men. Them Solomon means to teach, that all expectations of bliss, which rest solely on earthly possessions and pleasures, shall end in disappointment. But surely he did not intend to assert, that there is no material difference in the pursuits of men, or that no real happiness of any kind could now be attained by the virtuous. For, besides the unanswerable objection which this would form against the divine administration, it would directly contradict what he elsewhere asserts, that while *God giveth sore travail to the sinner, he giveth to the man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.** It may, it must indeed be admitted, that unmixed and complete happiness is unknown on earth. No regulation of conduct can altogether prevent passions from disturbing our peace, and misfortunes from wounding our heart. But after this concession is made, will it follow that there is no object on earth which deserves our pursuit, or that all enjoyment becomes contemptible which is not perfect? Let us survey our state with an impartial eye, and be just to the various gifts of Heaven. How vain soever this life, considered in itself, may be, the comforts and hopes of religion are sufficient to give solidity to the enjoyments of the righteous. In the exercise of good affections, and the testimony of an approving conscience; in the sense of peace and reconciliation with God through the great Redeemer of mankind; in the firm confidence of being conducted through all the trials of life by infinite wisdom and goodness; and in the joyful prospect of arriving in the end at immortal felicity; they possess a happiness which, descending from a purer and more perfect religion than this world, partakes not of its vanity.

Besides the enjoyments peculiar to religion, there are other pleasures of our present state, which, though of an inferior order, must not be overlooked in the estimate of human life. It is necessary to call attention to these, in order to check that repining and unthankful spirit to which man is always too prone. Some degree of importance must be allowed to the comforts of health, to the innocent gratifications of sense, and to the entertainment afforded us by all the beautiful scenes of nature; some to the pursuits and amusements of social life; and more to the internal enjoyments of thought and reflection, and to the pleasures of affectionate intercourse with those whom we love. These comforts are often held in too low estimation, merely because they are ordinary and common; although that be the circumstance which ought, in reason, to enhance their value. They lie open, in some degree, to all; extend through every rank of life, and fill up agreeably many of those spaces in our present existence, which are not occupied with higher objects, or with serious cares.

We are in several respects unjust to Providence in the computation of our pleasures and our pains. We number the hours which are spent in distress or sorrow; but we forget those which have passed away, if not in high enjoyment, yet in the midst of those gentle satisfactions and placid emotions which make life glide smoothly

along. We complain of the frequent disappointments which we suffer in our pursuits. But we recollect not, that it is in pursuit, more than in attainment, that our pleasure now consists. In the present state of human nature, man derives more enjoyment from the exertion of his active powers in the midst of toils and efforts, than he could receive from a still and uniform possession of the object which he strives to gain. The solace of the mind under all its labours, is hope; and there are few situations which entirely exclude it. Forms of expected bliss are often gleaming upon us through a cloud, to revive and exhilarate the most distressed. If pains be scattered through all the conditions of life, so also are pleasures. Happiness, as far as life affords it, can be engrossed by no rank of men to the exclusion of the rest; on the contrary, it is often found where, at first view, it would have been least expected. When the human condition appears most depressed, the feelings of men, through the gracious appointment of Providence, adjust themselves wonderfully to their state, and enable them to extract satisfaction from sources that are totally unknown to others. Were the great body of men fairly to compute the hours which they pass in ease, and even with some degree of pleasure, they would be found far to exceed the number of those which are spent in absolute pain either of body or mind. But in order to make a still more accurate estimation of the degree of satisfaction which, in the midst of earthly vanity, man is permitted to enjoy, the three following observations claim our attention:—

THE first is, That many of the evils which occasion our complaints of the world are wholly imaginary. They derive their existence from fancy and humour, and childish subjection to the opinion of others. The distress which they produce, I admit, is real; but its reality arises not from the nature of things, but from that disorder of imagination which a small measure of reflection might rectify. In proof of this, we may observe that the persons who live most simply, and follow the dictates of plain undualterated nature, are most exempted from this class of evils. It is among the higher ranks of mankind that they chiefly abound; where fantastic refinements, sickly delicacy, and eager emulation, open a thousand sources of vexation peculiar to themselves. Life cannot but prove vain to them who affect a disrelish of every pleasure that is not both exquisite and new; who measure enjoyment not by their own feelings, but by the standard of fashion; who think themselves miserable if others do not admire their state. It is not from wants or sorrows that their complaints arise; but, though it may appear a paradox, from too much freedom from sorrow and want; from the languor of vacant life, and the irritation occasioned by those stagnating humours which ease and indulgence have bred within them. In their case, therefore, it is not the vanity of the world, but the vanity of their minds, which is to be accused. Fancy has raised up the spectres which haunt them. Fancy has formed the cloud which hangs over their life. Did they allow the light of reason to break forth, the spectres would vanish, and the cloud be dispelled.

THE second observation on this head is, That, of those evils which

may be called real, because they owe not their existence to fancy, nor can be removed by rectifying opinion, a great proportion is brought upon us by our own misconduct. Diseases, poverty, disappointment, and shame, are far from being, in every instance, the unavoidable doom of men. They are much more frequently the offspring of their own misguided choice. Intemperance engenders disease, sloth produces poverty, pride creates disappointments, and dishonesty exposes to shame. The ungoverned passions of men betray them into a thousand follies; their follies into crimes; and their crimes into misfortunes. Yet nothing is more common than for such as have been the authors of their own misery, to make loud complaints of the hard fate of man, and to take revenge upon the human condition by arraigning its supposed vanity. *The foolishness of man first perverteth his way, and then his heart fretteth against the Lord.*

I do not, however, maintain, that it is within our power to be altogether free of those self-procured evils. For perfection of any kind is beyond the reach of man. Where is the wisdom that never errs? where the just man that offendeth not? Nevertheless, much is here left to ourselves; and, imperfect as we are, the consequences of right or of wrong conduct make a wide difference in the happiness of men. Experience every day shows, that a sound, a well-governed, and virtuous mind contributes greatly to smooth the path of life; and that *wisdom excelleth folly as far as light excelleth darkness. The way of the wicked is as darkness; they know not at what they stumble. But the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his ways; and he that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.* The tendency of the one is towards a plain and safe region. The course of the other leads him amidst snares and precipices. The one occasionally may, the other unavoidably must, incur much trouble. Let us not then confound, under one general charge, those evils of the world which belong to the lot of humanity, and those which, through divine assistance, a wise and good man may, in a great measure, escape.

THE third observation which I make respects those evils which are both real and unavoidable; from which neither wisdom nor goodness can procure our exemption. Under these this comfort remains, that if they cannot be prevented, there are means, however, by which they may be much alleviated. Religion is the great principle which acts under such circumstances, as the corrective of human vanity. It inspires fortitude, supports patience, and, by its prospects and promises, darts a cheering ray into the darkest shade of human life. If it cannot secure the virtuous from disappointment in their pursuits, it forms them to such a temper as renders their disappointments more light and easy than those of other men. If it does not banish dissatisfaction from their worldly pleasures, it confers spiritual pleasures in their stead. If it ensures them not the possession of what they love, it furnishes comfort under the loss. As far as it establishes a contented frame of mind, it supplies the want of all that worldly men covet to possess. Compare the behaviour of the sensual and corrupted with that of the upright and holy, when both are

feeling the effects of human vanity, and the difference of their situation will be manifest. Among the former, you are likely to find a querulous and dejected; among the latter, a composed and manly spirit. The lamentations of the one excite a mixture of pity and contempt; while the dignity which the other maintains in distress, commands respect. The sufferings of the former settle into a peevish and fretful disposition; those of the latter soften the temper, and improve the heart. These consequences extend so far as to give ground for asserting, that a good man enjoys more happiness in the course of a seemingly unprosperous life, than a bad man does in the midst of affluence and luxury. What a conspicuous proof of this is afforded by the Apostle Paul, who from the very depth of affliction could send forth such a triumphant voice as proclaims the complete victory which he had gained over the evils of life! *Troubled on every side, yet not distressed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed. For, though our outward man perish, our inward man is renewed, day by day.** Such, though perhaps in an inferior degree, will be the influence of a genuine religious principle upon all true Christians. It begins to perform that office to them here, which hereafter it will more completely discharge, of *wiping away the tears from their eyes.*

SUCH, upon the whole, is the estimate which we are to form of human life. Much vanity will always belong to it; though the degree of its vanity will depend, in a great measure, on our own character and conduct. To the vicious, it presents nothing but a continued scene of disappointment and dissatisfaction. To the good, it is a mixed state of things; where many real comforts may be enjoyed; where many resources under trouble may be obtained; but where trouble, in one form or other, is to be expected as the lot of man. From this view of human life,

THE first practical conclusion which we are to draw is, That it highly concerns us not to be unreasonable in our expectations of worldly felicity. Let us always remember where we are; from what causes the human state has become subject to depression; and upon what accounts it must remain under its present law. Such is the infatuation of self-love, that though in the general doctrine of the vanity of the world all men agree, yet almost every one flatters himself that his own case is to be an exception from the common rule. He rests on expectations which he thinks cannot fail him; and though the present be not altogether according to his wish, yet with the confidence of certain hope he anticipates futurity. Hence the anguish of disappointments fills the world; and evils, which are of themselves sufficiently severe, oppress with double force the unprepared and unsuspecting mind.* Nothing therefore is of greater consequence to our peace, than to have always before our eyes such views of the world as shall prevent our expecting more from it than it is destined to afford. We destroy our joys by devouring them before hand with too eager expectation. We ruin the happiness of life when we attempt to raise it too high. A tolerable

* 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9. 16.

and comfortable state is all that we can propose to ourselves on earth. Peace and contentment, not bliss nor transport, is the full portion of man. Perfect joy is reserved for heaven.

BUT while we repress too sanguine hopes formed upon human life, let us, in the second place, guard against the other extreme, of repining and discontent. Enough has been already said to show, that, notwithstanding the vanity of the world, a considerable degree of comfort is attainable in the present state. Let the recollection of this serve to reconcile us to our condition, and to check the arrogance of complaints and murmurs.—What art thou, O son of man! who, having sprung but yesterday out of the dust, darest to lift up thy voice against thy Maker, and to arraign his providence, because all things are not ordered according to thy wish? What title hast thou to find fault with the order of the universe, whose lot is so much beyond what thy virtue or merit gave thee ground to claim? Is it nothing to thee to have been introduced into this magnificent world; to have been admitted as a spectator of the Divine wisdom and works; and to have had access to all the comforts which Nature, with a bountiful hand, has poured forth around thee? Are all the hours forgotten which thou hast passed in ease, in complacency, or joy? Is it a small favour in thy eyes, that the hand of Divine mercy has been stretched forth to aid thee, and, if thou reject not its proffered assistance, is ready to conduct thee into a happier state of existence? When thou comparest thy condition with thy desert, blush, and be ashamed of thy complaints. Be silent, be grateful, and adore. Receive with thankfulness the blessings which are allowed thee. Revere that government which at present refuses thee more. Rest in this conclusion, that though there be evils in the world, its Creator is wise and good, and has been bountiful to thee.

IN the third place, The view which we have taken of human life should naturally direct us to such pursuits as may have most influence for correcting its vanity. There are two great lines of conduct which offer themselves to our choice. The one leads towards the goods of the mind; the other towards those of fortune. The former, which is adopted only by the few, engages us chiefly in forming our principles, regulating our dispositions, improving all our inward powers. The latter, which in every age has been followed by the multitude, points at no other end but attaining the conveniences and pleasures of external life. It is obvious, that, in this last pursuit, the vanity of the world will encounter us at every step. For this is the region in which it reigns, and where it chiefly displays its power. At the same time, to lay the world totally out of view, is a vain attempt. The numberless ties by which we are connected with external things, put it out of our power to behold them with indifference. But though we cannot wrap ourselves up entirely in the care of the mind, yet the more we make its welfare our chief object, the nearer shall we approach to that happy independence on the world, which places us beyond the reach of suffering from its vanity.

That discipline, therefore, which corrects the eagerness of worldly passions, which fortifies the heart with virtuous principles, which en-

lightens the mind with useful knowledge, and furnishes to it matter of enjoyment from within itself, is of more consequence to real felicity, than all the provision which we can make of the goods of fortune. To this let us bend our chief attention. Let us *keep the heart with all diligence, seeing out of it are the issues of life*. Let us account our mind the most important province which is committed to our care; and if we cannot rule fortune, study at least to rule ourselves. Let us propose for our object, not worldly success, which it depends not on us to obtain; but that upright and honourable discharge of our duty in every conjuncture, which, through the Divine assistance, is always within our power. Let our happiness be sought where our proper praise is found; and that be accounted our only real evil, which is the evil of our nature; not that, which is either the appointment of Providence, or which arises from the evil of others.

BUT, in order to carry on with success this rational and manly plan of conduct, it is necessary, in the last place, that to moral, we join religious discipline. Under the present imperfection of our minds, and amidst the frequent shocks which we receive from human evils, much do we stand in need of every assistance for supporting our constancy. Of all assistance to which we can have recourse, none is so powerful as what may be derived from the principles of the Christian faith. He who builds on any other foundation, will find in the day of trial that he had built his house on the sand. Man is formed by his nature to look up to a superiour being, and to lean upon a strength that is greater than his own. All the considerations which we can offer for confirming his mind, presuppose this resource, and derive from it their principal efficacy.

Never then let us lose sight of those great objects which religion brings under our view, if we hope to stand firm and erect amidst the dangers and distresses of our present state. Let us cultivate all that connection with the great Father of Spirits which our condition admits; by piety and prayer; by dependence on his aid, and trust in his promises; by a devout sense of his presence, and a continual endeavour to acquire his grace and favour. Let us, with humble faith and reverence, commit ourselves to the blessed Redeemer of the world; encouraged by the discoveries which he has made to us of the divine mercy, and by the hopes which he has afforded us of being raised to a nobler and happier station in the kingdom of God. So shall virtue, grounded upon piety, attain its full strength. Inspired with a religious spirit, and guided by rational principles, we shall be enabled to hold a steady course through this mixed region of pleasure and pain, of hopes and fears; until the period arrive when that cloud which the present vanity of the world throws over human affairs, shall entirely disappear, and eternal light be diffused over all the works and ways of God.

SERMON XXIII.

ON DEATH.

PSALM xxxiii. 4.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

THIS Psalm exhibits the pleasing picture of a pious man rejoicing in the goodness of Heaven. He looks around him on his state, and his heart overflows with gratitude. When he reviews the past part of his life, he contemplates God as his *shepherd, who hath made him lie down in green pastures, and led him beside the still waters.* When he considers the present, he beholds his divine benefactor *preparing a table for him in the presence of his enemies, and making his cup run over.* When he looks forward to the future, he confides in the same goodness, as continuing to *follow him all the days of his life, and bringing him to dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.* Amidst these images of tranquillity and happiness, one object presents itself, which is sufficient to overcast the minds and to damp the joy of the greatest part of men; that is, the approach of death. But on the Psalmist it produced no such effect. With perfect composure and serenity, he looks forward to the time when he is to pass through the *valley of the shadow of death.* The prospect, instead of dejecting him, appears to heighten his triumph, by that security which the presence of his almighty Guardian afforded him. *I will fear no evil, for thou art with me;* and pursuing the allusion with which he had begun, exults in the hope that the shepherd who had hitherto conducted him, would support him with his *staff*, while he passed through that dark and perilous region, and with his rod, or pastoral crook, would guard him from every danger.

Such is the happy distinction which good men enjoy, in a situation the most formidable to human nature. That threatening spectre which appals others, carries no terror to them. While worldly men are justly said *through fear of death to be all their life-time subject to bondage,* to the righteous only it belongs to look on death, and smile. Since then it is in the power of religion to confer upon us so high a privilege, let us adventure to contemplate steadily this last foe whom we must all encounter. Let us consider what death is in itself, and by what means good men are enabled to meet it with fortitude. Though the subject may be reckoned gloomy, it must be admitted to be interesting. The close of life is a solemn and important event, to which every wise man will have regard in the general tenour of his conduct. No one can act his part with propriety, who considers not how it is to terminate; and to exclude from our thoughts what we cannot prevent from actually taking place, is the refuge of none but the timorous and weak. We are more encouraged to enter on this meditation, by reflecting on the superiour advantages which, as

Christians, we enjoy for overcoming the fear of death, and that holy man whose sentiment is now before us. Those great objects, which he beheld through the medium of types and figures, are clearly revealed to us. That dispensation of grace, which in his days began to open, is now completed. That life and immortality, which then only dawned on the world, have now shone forth with full light and splendour.

DEATH may be considered in three views: as the separation of the soul from the body; as the conclusion of the present life; as the entrance into a new state of existence. In the first view, it is regarded as painful and agonizing. In the second, it is melancholy and dejecting. In the third, it is awful and alarming. One of the first inquiries which occurs concerning it is, for what purposes it was clothed with all these terrors? Why, under the government of a gracious Being, the termination of life was loaded with so much sorrow and distress? We know that, in consequence of the fall, death was inflicted as a punishment upon the human race. But no unnecessary severities are ever exercised by God; and the wisdom and goodness of the divine plan will be much illustrated, by observing that all the formidable circumstances which attend death are, in the present situation of mankind, absolutely requisite to the proper government of the world. The terrors of death are, in fact, the great guardians of life. They excite in every individual that desire of self-preservation, which is Nature's first law. They reconcile him to bear the distresses of life with patience. They prompt him to undergo its useful and necessary labours with alacrity; and they restrain him from many of those evil courses by which his safety would be endangered. While they are in so many respects beneficial to the individual, they are, at the same time, the safeguard of society. If death were not dreaded and abhorred as it is by men, no public order could be preserved in the world. The sword of authority were held up in vain. The sanctions of law would lose their effect. The thief and the executioner would be derided; and the violent left to trample unrestrained on the rights of the peaceful. If, notwithstanding the restraints which self-preservation imposes, society is so often disturbed by the crimes of the wicked, what a scene of confusion would it become, if capital punishments, which are the last resource of government, were of no influence to deter offenders!

For such important ends the conclusion of life has, by the appointment of Providence, been made an awful object. The valley of death has been planted with terrors to the apprehension of men. Here, as in many other instances, what seemed at first to arraign the goodness of the Deity, is upon inquiry found to confirm it. But though, for the most salutary purposes, it was requisite that the fear of death should be a powerful principle in human nature, yet, like our other propensities, it is apt, when left to itself, to run into excess. Over many it usurps such an ascendant as to debase their character, and to defeat the chief ends of living. To preserve it within such bounds that it shall not interrupt us in performing the proper offices and duties of life, is the distinction of the brave man above the coward;

and to surmount it in such a degree, that it shall not, even in near prospect, deject our spirit, or trouble our peace, is the great preference which virtue enjoys above guilt. It has been the study of the wise and reflecting, in every age, to attain this steadiness of mind. Philosophy pursued it as its chief object; and professed that the great end of its discipline was, to enable its votaries to conquer the fear of death. Let us then, before we have recourse to the more powerful aid of Religion, hearken for a little to what Reason has suggested on this subject. Her assistance may, perhaps, be not entirely despicable; and though the armour which she offers be not completely of proof, it may serve, however, to turn aside, or to blunt, some of the shafts which are aimed against us by the last foe.

AFTER this manner she may be supposed to address mankind, in order to reconcile them to their fate:—Children of men! it is well known to you, that you are a mortal race. Death is the law of your nature, the tribute of your being, the debt which all are bound to pay. On these terms you received life, that you should be ready to give it up when Providence calls you to make room for others, who, in like manner, when their time is come, shall follow you. He who is unwilling to submit to death when Heaven decrees it, deserves not to have lived. You might as reasonably complain that you did not live before the time appointed for your coming into the world, as lament that you are not to live longer, when the period of your quitting it is arrived. What divine Providence hath made necessary, human prudence ought to comply with cheerfully. Submit at any rate you must; and is it not much better to follow of your own accord, than to be dragged reluctantly, and by force? What privilege have you to plead, or what reason to urge, why you should possess an exemption from the common doom? All things around you mortal and perishing. Cities, states, and empires, have their I set. The proudest monuments of human art moulder into

Even the works of nature wax old and decay. In the midst of this universal tendency to change, could you expect that to your frame alone a permanent duration should be given? All who have gone before you, have submitted to the stroke of death. All who are to come after you, shall undergo the same fate. The great and the good, the prince and the peasant, the renowned and the obscure, travel alike the road which leads to the grave. At the moment when you expire, thousands throughout the world, shall, together with you, be yielding up their breath. Can that be held a great calamity, which is common to you with every thing that lives on earth; which is an event as much according to the course of nature, as it is that leaves shall fall in autumn, or that fruit should drop from the tree when it is fully ripe?

The pain of death cannot be very long, and is probably less severe than what you have at other times experienced. The pomp of death is more terrifying than death itself. It is to the weakness of imagination that it owes its chief power of dejecting your spirits; for when the force of the mind is roused, there is almost no passion in the human nature but what has showed itself able to overcome the fear of

death. Honour has defied death; love has despised it; shame has rushed upon it; revenge has disregarded it; grief a thousand times has wished for its approach. Is it not strange that reason and virtue cannot give you strength to surmount that fear, which, even in feeble minds, so many passions have conquered? What inconsistency is there in complaining so much of the evils of life, and being at the same time so afraid of what is to terminate them all? Who can tell whether his future life might not teem with disasters and miseries, as yet unknown, were it to be prolonged according to his wish? At any rate, is it desirable to draw life out to the last dregs, and to wait till old age pour upon you its whole store of diseases and sorrows? You lament that you are to die; but did you view your situation properly, you would have much greater cause to lament if you were chained to this life for two or three hundred years, without possibility of release. Expect therefore calmly that which is natural in itself, and which must be fit, because it is the appointment of Heaven. Perform your duty as a good subject of the Deity, during the time allotted you; and rejoice that a period is fixed for your dismissal from the present warfare. Remember that the slavish dread of death destroys all the comfort of that life which you seek to preserve. Better to undergo the stroke of death at once, than to live in perpetual misery from the fear of dying.

SUCH discourses as these are specious at least, and plausible. The arguments are not without strength, and ought to produce some effect on a considerate reflecting mind. But it is to be suspected that their effect will be chiefly felt when the mind is calm and at ease; rather when speculating upon death at a distance, than when beholding it at hand. When the critical moment arrives, which places the anxious, trembling soul on the borders of an unknown world, reasonings drawn from necessity and propriety will be of small avail to quiet its alarms. In order to afford relief, you must give it hope; you must promise it protection; you must offer somewhat on which it can lay hold for support amidst the struggles of labouring nature. Hence the great importance of those discoveries which revelation has made, and of those principles with which it fortifies the heart. To the consideration of these let us next proceed, and observe their superiour efficacy for surmounting the fear of death. In order to judge of their importance, it will be proper to take a view of death in each of those lights in which it appears most formidable to mankind.

It may be considered, first, as the termination of our present existence; the final period of all its joys and hopes. The concluding scene of any course of action in which we have been engaged with pleasure, even the last sight of objects which we have been long accustomed to behold, seldom fails of striking the mind with painful regret. How many circumstances will concur to heighten that regret, when the time comes of our bidding an eternal adieu to the light of day; to every pursuit which had occupied our attention as citizens of the world; and to every friend and relation who had attached our hearts! How dejecting is the thought to the greatest part of men, that the sun shall rise, and the seasons shall return to others, but no

more to them; and that, while their neighbours are engaged in the usual affairs of life, they shall be shut up in a dark lonesome mansion, forgotten and cut off from among men, as though they never had been! *I said, in the cutting off my days, I shall go to the gates of the grave. I shall be deprived of the residue of my years. I shall not see the Lord again in the land of the living. I shall behold man no more with the inhabitants of the world.**

Let us now observe, that the dejection into which we are apt to sink at such a juncture, will bear proportion to the degree of our attachment to the objects which we leave, and to the importance of those resources which remain with us when they are gone. He who is taking farewell of a country through which he had travelled with satisfaction, and he who is driven from his native land, with which he had connected every idea of settlement and comfort, will have very different feelings at the time of departure. Such is the difference which, at the hour of death, takes place between the righteous and the ungodly. The latter knows nothing higher or better than the present state of existence. His interests, his pleasures, his expectations, all centered here. He lived solely for the enjoyments of this world. Dreadful, therefore, and insupportable must be that event which separates him from these for ever. Whereas the culture of religion had previously formed the mind of a Christian for a calm and easy transition from this life. It had instructed him in the proper estimate of sublunary happiness. It had set higher prospects before him. It had formed him to a more refined taste of enjoyment, than what the common round of worldly amusements could gratify. It gave him connections and alliances with spiritual objects, which are unknown to the men of the world. Hence, though he be attached to life by the natural feelings of humanity, he is raised above the weak and unmanly regret of parting with it. He knew that it was intended as preparatory only to a succeeding state. As soon as the season of preparation should be finished, he expected a removal; and when Providence gives the signal, he bids adieu to the world with composed resolution and undisturbed heart. What though death interrupt him in the middle of his design, and break off the plans which he had formed, of being useful to his family and the world? All these he leaves with tranquillity in the hands of that Providence to which he has ever been accustomed to look up with resignation; which governed the world wisely and graciously before he existed; and which he knows will continue to govern it with equal wisdom and benignity when he shall be in it no more. The time of his departure was not left to his own choice; but he believes it to be the most proper, because it is the time chosen by Him who cannot err. *Honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that which is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the grey hair to man; and an unspotted life is old age.*† When he beholds his friends and relations mourning around him, his heart may melt, but will not be overpowered; for it is relieved by the thought that he is bidding them only a temporary, not an eternal farewell.

* Isaiah, xxxiii. 10, 11.

† Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 9.

mends them, in the mean time, to the blessing of that God whom he has served ; and while he is parting from them, he hears a voice which soothes his spirit with those comforting words, *Leave thy fatherless children ; I will preserve them alive ; and let thy widows trust in me.*

But death is more than the conclusion of human life. It is the gate which, at the same time that it closes on this world, opens into eternity. Under this view, it has often been the subject of terrour to the serious and reflecting. The transition they were about to make was awful. Before them lay a vast undiscovered region, from whose bounds no traveller ever returned to bring information of the reception which he found, or of the objects which he met with there. The first conception which suggests itself is, that the disembodied spirit is to appear before its Creator, who is then to act as its Judge. The strict inquisition which it must undergo, the impartial doom which it must hear pronounced, and the unalterable state to which it shall be assigned, are awful forms rising before the imagination. They are ideas which conscience forces upon all. Mankind can neither avoid considering themselves as accountable creatures, nor avoid viewing death as the season when their account is to be given. Such a sentiment is with most men the source of dread ; with all men, of anxiety. To a certain degree, a good conscience will convey comfort. The reflection on a well-spent life makes a wide difference between the last moments of the righteous and the sinner. But whose conscience is so clear as to strike him with no remorse ? Whose righteousness is so unblemished as to abide the scrutiny of of the great searcher of hearts ? Who dares rest his everlasting fate upon his perfect conformity to the rule of duty throughout the whole of his life ?

We must not judge of the sentiments of men at the approach of death, by their ordinary train of thought in the days of health and ease. Their views of moral conduct are then, too generally, superficial ; slight excuses satisfy their minds, and the avocations of life prevent their attention from dwelling long on disagreeable subjects. But when altogether withdrawn from the affairs of the world, they are left to their own reflections on past conduct ; with their spirits enfeebled by disease, and their minds impressed with the terrors of an invisible region ; the most resolute are apt to despond, and even the virtuous are in danger of sinking under the remembrance of their errors and frailties. The trembling mind casts every-where around an anxious exploring eye after any power that can uphold, any mercy that will shield and save it. And accordingly we see how eagerly every device has been embraced, which superstition could invent in various countries, for quieting the alarms of the departing spirit.

Here appears the great importance of those discoveries which Christianity has made concerning the government of the universe. It displays the ensigns of grace and clemency. It reveals the Almighty, not as a creator only and a judge, but as a compassionate parent, *who knows our frame, who remembers we are dust, who pities us as a father pities his children ; and with whom there is forgiveness, that he may*

be loved as well as feared. These general views, however, of the divine administration, would not have been sufficient to give full relief, if they had not been confirmed by certain decisive facts to which the mind can appeal amidst all its doubts and fears. Two such facts the Gospel holds forth to us, particularly adapted to the situation of human nature in its greatest extremity; the atonement and the intercession of Christ. There is no sentiment more natural to men than this, that guilt must be expiated by suffering. All government is founded on the principle, that public justice requires compensation for crimes; and all religions proceed upon the belief, that, in order to the pardon of the sinner, atonement must be made to the justice of Heaven. Hence the endless variety of sacrifices, victims, and expiations, which have filled the earth. The great sacrifice which our Redeemer offered for guilt, coincides with these natural sentiments of mankind in giving ease to the heart. It shows us the forfeit of guilt paid by a divine personage in our behalf; and allows us to look up to the Governour of the world, as merciful to the guilty in consistency with justice and order. But still some anxiety might remain concerning the extension of that mercy to our own case in particular. An invisible sovereign is an awful idea; almighty, unknown power, is always formidable, and would be ready to overwhelm the spirit of the feeble, were not an intercessor with that sovereign revealed. This intercessor is one who lived and acted in our own nature; who not only knows, but who experienced our frailty; who has all the feelings of a brother for human infirmity and distress; who himself passed through that *valley of the shadow of death* which is now opening on us; to whose powerful mediation with his Father, we have every encouragement to commit the charge of our departing spirit.—Such is the provision which Christianity has made for comforting the last hours of man. The atonement, and the intercession of Christ, are the refuge of the penitent sinner, and the consolation of the saint. By their means, the throne of the universe is encircled with mercy. The cloud which hung over the invisible world begins to be dispersed; and hope brightens through the gloom.

BUT what completes the triumph of good men over death, is the prospect of eternal felicity. This was the great object after which all nations have sighed, as the only complete remedy both of the miseries of life and the fears of death. On this, the learned and the ignorant, the civilized and the savage tribes of mankind, bent their longing eyes; eagerly grasping at every argument, and fondly indulging every hope, that could promise them a propitious Deity, and a prolongation of existence in a happier state. But beyond wishes and feeble expectations, the light of nature could hardly reach. Even the most cultivated, philosophical mind was, at the hour of dissolution, left in painful suspense. Christianity has put an end to all hesitation and doubt on this important subject. It has drawn aside the veil through which reason essayed to penetrate; and has displayed to full view the future dwellings of the spirits of the just, the mansions of everlasting rest, *the city of the living God*. Not only has it informed us that a state of perfect felicity is prepared for the right-

eous, but it has added to this information a variety of circumstances which render that state sensible to our imagination, and encouraging to our hopes. It represents it as fully secured by the gracious undertaking of the Saviour of the world. It describes it as *an inheritance*, to which he has given his followers a right and title. He is said to have taken possession of it in their name. He rose from the grave as *the first-fruits of them that sleep*; and under the character of their *fore-runner*, entered into the heavenly regions. *I am the resurrection and the life. He that believeth on me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. I give unto my sheep eternal life. I ascend to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.**

Hence, to those who have lived a virtuous life, and who die in the faith of Christ, the whole aspect of death is changed. Death is to them no longer the tyrant who approaches with his iron rod, but the messenger who brings the tidings of life and liberty. The prospects which open to them cheer their minds. Even in the valley of death's shade, *green pastures* appear to rise. They view themselves as going forth, not to lie silent and solitary in the darkness of the grave, not to wander forsaken in the wide deserts of the universe, not even to pass into a region where they are altogether strangers and unknown; but to enter on a land, new indeed to sight, but by faith and hope frequented long before; where they shall continue to be under the charge of him who hath hitherto been their guardian, be re-united to many of their ancient and beloved friends, and admitted to join the *innumerable multitude, gathered out of all nations, and tongues, and people, who stand before the throne of God*. They leave behind the dregs of their nature; and exchange this confined and gloomy apartment of the universe, for the glorious mansions of their Father's house. Blessed surely are the dying in this hope, and *blessed the dead in this fruition, resting from their labours, and followed by their works*. Good men are detained at present in the outer court of the temple: Death admits them into the holy place. As yet, they sojourn in the territories of pilgrimage and exile: Death brings them home to the native land of Spirits. In this world, they are divided from one another, and mingled with the worthless and vile: Death unites in one assembly all the pure and the just. *In the sight of the unwise they seemed to die, and their departure was taken for utter destruction. But they are in peace. Their reward also is with the Lord, and the care of them with the Most High.† — O Death! where is now thy sting? O Grave! where is thy victory?* Where are the terrors with which thou hast so long affrighted the nations? Where are thy dreary and desolate domains, the haunts of spectres and shades, the abhorred dwellings of darkness and corruption? At the touch of the divine rod, thy visionary horrors have fled. The spell is broken. The dawn of the celestial morning has dispelled thy dismal gloom; and, instead of the *habitations of dragons*, appears the paradise of God.

BUT supposing both the regret of quitting life, and the dread of entering into a future state, to be overcome, there is still one circum-

* John, xi. 25. — xx. 17.

† Wisdom of Solomon, iii. 2, 3. — v. 15.

cumstance which renders death formidable to many; that is, the shock which nature is apprehending to sustain at the separation of the soul from the body. Formidable, I admit, this may justly render it to them whose languishing spirits have no inward fund whence they can then draw relief. Firmness and strength of mind are peculiarly requisite for the support of nature in its last extremity; and that strength is supplied by religion. The testimony of a good conscience, and the remembrance of a virtuous life, a well-grounded trust in the divine acceptance, and a firm hope of future felicity, are principles sufficient to give composure and fortitude to the heart, even in the midst of agony. In what a high degree they can suspend or alleviate the feelings of pain, has been fully demonstrated, by the magnanimous behaviour of such as have suffered death in the cause of conscience and religion. How often has the world beheld them advancing to meet that supposed king of terrors, not with calmness only, but with joy; raised by divine prospects and hopes, into an entire neglect and contempt of bodily suffering?

It is not without reason that a peculiar assistance from Heaven is looked for by good men at the hour of death. As they are taught to believe, that in all the emergencies of their life divine goodness has watched over them, they have ground to conclude, that at the last it will not forsake them; but that, at the season when its aid is most needed, it shall be most liberally communicated. Accordingly, a persuasion so congruous to the benignity and compassion of the Father of mercies, has been the comfort of pious men in every age. *My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart. In the valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for thou art with me.* When the rod and staff of this Shepherd of Israel are held forth to his expiring servants, declining nature needs no other support. The secret influence of his reviving Spirit is sufficient for their consolation and strength, while the painful struggle with mortality lasts; till at length, when the moment arrives that *the silver cord must be loosed, and the golden bowl be broken*, their Almighty Protector carries off the immortal spirit unhurt by the fall of its earthly tabernacle, and places it in a better mansion. — How respectable and happy is such a conclusion of human life, when one in this manner quits the stage of time, honoured and supported with the presence of his Creator, and enjoying, till the last moment of reflection, the pleasing thought, that he has not lived in vain! *I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give me at that day.**

AFTER the view which we have taken of the advantages possessed by good men for overcoming the fears of death, the first sentiment which should arise in our minds, is gratitude to Heaven for the hopes which we enjoy by means of the Christian religion. How depressed and calamitous was the human condition, as long as the terror of death hung, like a dark cloud, over the inhabitants of the earth; when, after all the toils of life, the melancholy silence of the

grave appeared finally to close the scene of existence; or, if a future state opened behind it, that state teemed with all those forms of horror which conscious guilt could suggest to a terrified imagination! The happiest change which ever took place in the circumstances of the human race, is that produced by the discoveries with which we are blessed, concerning the government of the universe, the redemption of the world, and the future destination of man. How much dignity is thereby added to the human character and state! What light and cheerfulness is introduced into our abode! What eternal praise is due to Him, who, *according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again into a lively hope, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven!*

THE next effect which the subject we have considered should produce, is an earnest desire to acquire those advantages which good men enjoy at their death. The road which leads to them is plain and obvious. A peaceful and happy death is, by the appointment of Heaven, connected with a holy and virtuous life. Let us renounce criminal pursuits and pleasures; let us fear God, and keep his commandments; let us *hold faith and a good conscience*, if we hope for comfort at our last hour. To prepare for this last hour, every wise man should consider as his most important concern. Death may justly be held the test of life. Let a man have supported his character with esteem and applause, as long as he acted on the busy stage of the world, if at the end he sinks into dejection and terror, all his former honour is effaced; he departs under the imputation of either a guilty conscience or a pusillanimous mind. In the other parts of human conduct, disguise and subtlety may impose on the world; but seldom can artifice be supported in the hour of death. The mask most commonly falls off, and the genuine character appears. When we behold the scene of life closed with proper composure and dignity, we naturally infer integrity and fortitude. We are led to believe that divine assistance supports the soul, and we presage its transition into a happier mansion. *Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright; for the end of that man is peace.**

THE last instruction, which our subject points out, respects the manner in which a wise and good man ought to stand affected towards life and death. He ought not to be servilely attached to the one. He has no reason abjectly to dread the other. Life is the gift of God, which he may justly cherish and hold dear. Nay, he is bound by all fair means to guard and preserve it, that he may continue to be useful in that post of duty where Providence has placed him. But there are higher principles to which the love of life should remain subordinate. Wherever religion, virtue, or true honour, call him forth to danger, life ought to be hazarded without fear. There is a generous contempt of death, which should distinguish those who live and walk by the faith of immortality. This is the source of courage in a Christian. His behaviour ought to show the elevation of his soul above the present world; ought to discover the liberty

* Psalm cxvii. 37.

which he possesses, of following the native sentiments of his mind, without any of those restraints and fetters which the fear of death imposes on vicious men.

At the same time, this rational contempt of death must carefully be distinguished from that inconsiderate and thoughtless indifference, with which some have affected to treat it. This is what cannot be justified on any principle of reason. Human life is, no trifle, which men may play away at their pleasure. Death, in every view, is an important event. It is the most solemn crisis of the human existence. A good man has reason to meet it with a calm and firm mind. But no man is entitled to treat it with ostentatious levity. It calls for manly seriousness of thought. It requires all the recollection of which we are capable; that with the proper disposition of dependent beings, when the dust is about to *return to its dust*, we may deliver up the spirit to Him who gave it.

SERMON XXIV.

ON THE HAPPINESS OF A FUTURE STATE.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

REVELATIONS, vii. 9.

After this I beheld, and, lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.

IN this mysterious book of Scripture many revolutions are foretold, which were to take place in the church of God. They are not indeed so foretold as to afford clear and precise information concerning the time of their coming to pass. It would have been, on many accounts, improper to have lifted up too far that awful veil which covers futurity. The intention of the Spirit of God was not to gratify the curiosity of the learned, by disclosing to them the fate of monarchies and nations, but to satisfy the serious concerning the general plan, and final issue, of the divine government. Amidst those distresses which befel Christians during the first ages, the discoveries made in this book were peculiarly seasonable; as they showed that there was an Almighty Guardian, who watched with particular attention over the interests of the church which he had formed; who foresaw all the commotions which were to happen among the kingdoms of the earth, and would so over-rule them as to promote in the end the cause of truth. This is the chief scope of those mystic visions with which the Apostle John was favoured; of seals opened in heaven; of trumpets sounding; and vials poured forth. The kingdom of darkness was to maintain for a while a violent struggle against the kingdom of light. But at the conclusion, a voice was to be heard, *as the voice of many waters and of mighty thundering saying, Allelujah, for the Lord God*

Omnipotent reigneth. The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall reign for ever. Such is the prospect with which the Divine Spirit at intervals enlightens, and with which he finally terminates, the many dark and dreful scenes that are exhibited in this book. In closing the canon of Scripture, he, with great propriety, leaves upon our mind deep impressions of the triumphs of righteousness, and of the blessedness of the redeemed. *After this I beheld, and, lo! a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.*

These words present a beautiful description of the happiness of saints in heaven; a subject on which it is, at all times, both comfortable and improving to meditate. On this day in particular, when we are to commemorate the dying love of our Saviour, we cannot be better employed than in contemplating what his love hath purchased; in order both to awaken our gratitude, and to confirm our attachment to him. The sacrament of the Supper is the oath of our fidelity. Let us dispose ourselves for celebrating it, by taking a view of the rewards which await the faithful. I shall, for this end, in several observations from the words of the Text, taken in connection with the context, endeavour to illustrate, in some imperfect degree, the prospect which is here afforded us of a state of future felicity; and then shall make practical improvement of the subject.

I. WHAT the words of the Text most obviously suggest is, that heaven is to be considered as a state of blessed society. *A multitude*, a numerous assembly, are here represented as sharing together the same felicity and honour. Without society, it is impossible for man to be happy. Place him in a region where he was surrounded with every pleasure; yet there, if he found himself a solitary individual, he would pine and languish. They are not merely our wants, and our mutual dependence, but our native instincts also, which impel us to associate together. The intercourse which we here maintain with our fellows, is a source of our chief enjoyments. But, alas! how much are these allayed by a variety of disagreeable circumstances that enter into all our connexions! Sometimes we suffer from the distresses of those whom we love; and sometimes from their vices or frailties. Where friendship is cordial, it is exposed to the wounds of painful sympathy, and to the anguish of violent separation. Where it is so cool as not to occasion sympathetic pains, it is never productive of much pleasure. The ordinary commerce of the world consists in a circulation of frivolous intercourse, in which the heart has no concern. It is generally insipid, and often soured by the slightest difference in humour, or opposition of interest. We fly to company, in order to be relieved from wearisome correspondence with ourselves; and the vexations which we meet with in society, drive us back again into solitude. Even among the virtuous, dissensions arise; and disagreement in opinion too often produces alienation of heart. We form few connexions where somewhat does not occur to disappoint

our hopes. The beginnings are often pleasing. We flatter ourselves with having found those who will never give us any disgust. But weaknesses are too soon discovered. Suspiciousness and love waxes cold. We are jealous of one another, and accustomed to live in disguise. A studied civility assumes the name without the pleasure, of friendship; and secret animosity and envy are often concealed under the caresses of dissembled affection.

Hence the pleasure of earthly society, like all our other pleasures, is extremely imperfect; and can give us a very faint conception of the joy that must arise from the society of perfect spirits in a happier world. Here, it is with difficulty that we can select from the corrupted crowd a few with whom we wish to associate in strict union. There, are assembled all the wise, the holy, and the just, who ever existed in the universe of God; without any distress to trouble their mutual bliss, or any source of disagreement to interrupt their perpetual harmony. Artifice and concealment are unknown there. There, no competitors struggle, no factions contend; no rivals supplant each other. The voice of discord never rises, the whisper of suspicion never circulates, among those innocent and benevolent spirits. Each, happy in himself, participates in the happiness of all the rest; and, by reciprocal communications of love and friendship, at once receives from and adds to the sum of general felicity. Renew the memory of the most affectionate friends with whom you were blest in any period of your life. Divest them of all those infirmities which adhere to the human character. Recal the most pleasing and tender moments which you ever enjoyed in their society; and the remembrance of those sensations may assist you in conceiving that felicity which is possessed by the saints above. The happiness of *brethren dwelling together in unity* is, with great justice and beauty, compared by the Psalmist to such things as are most refreshing to the heart of man: to the fragrant of the richest odours, and to the reviving influence of soft ethereal dews. *It is like the precious ointment poured on the head of Aaron, and like the dew of Hermon, even the dew that descendeth on the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commandeth the blessing, even life for evermore.**

Besides the felicity which springs from perfect love, there are two circumstances which particularly enhance the blessedness of that *multitude who stand before the throne*; these are, access to the most exalted society, and renewal of the most tender connexions. The former is pointed out in the Scripture by *joining the innumerable company of angels, and the general assembly and church of the first-born; by sitting down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven†*; a promise which opens the sublimest prospects to the human mind. It allows good men to entertain the hope, that separated from all the dregs of the human mass, from that mixed and polluted crowd in the midst of which they now dwell, they shall be permitted to mingle with prophets, patriarchs, and apostles, with legislators and heroes, with all those great and illustrious spirits, who have shone in former ages as the servants of God,

* Psalm cxxxiii. 2, 3.

† Heb. xii. 22, 23. Matt. viii. 11.

or the benefactors of men; whose deeds we are accustomed to celebrate; whose steps we now follow at a distance; and whose names we pronounce with veneration.

United to this holy assembly, the blessed at the same time renew those ancient connections with virtuous friends which had been dissolved by death. The prospect of this awakens in the heart the most pleasing and tender sentiment which perhaps can fill it in this mortal state. For, of all the sorrows which we are here doomed to endure, none is so bitter as that occasioned by the fatal stroke which separates us, in appearance, for ever, from those to whom either nature or friendship had intimately joined our hearts. Memory, from time to time, renews the anguish; opens the wound which seemed once to have been closed; and, by recalling joys that are past and gone, touches every spring of painful sensibility. In these agonizing moments, how relieving the thought, that the separation is only temporary, not eternal; that there is a time to come, of re-union with those with whom our happiest days were spent; whose joys and sorrows once were ours; and from whom, after we shall have landed on the peaceful shore where they dwell, no revolutions of nature shall ever be able to part us more! — Such is the society of the blessed above. Of such are the multitude composed who *stand before the throne*. Let us now observe,

II. THAT this is not only a blessed but a numerous society. It is called a *multitude*, a *great multitude*, a *great multitude which no man could number*. These expressions convey the most enlarged views of the kingdom of glory. Dismay not yourselves with the apprehension of heaven being a confined and almost inaccessible region, into which it is barely possible for a small handful to gain admission, after making their escape from the general wreck of the human race. *In my Father's house*, said our Saviour, *there are many mansions*. That *city of the living God*, towards which you profess to bend your course, is prepared for the reception of citizens innumerable. It already abounds with inhabitants, and more and more shall be added to it, until the end of time. Whatever difficulties there are in the way which leads to it, they have been often surmounted. The path, though narrow, is neither impassable nor untrodden. Though the gate stands not so wide as that which opens into hell, yet through the narrow gate multitudes have entered, and been crowned.

It is much to be lamented, that, among all denominations of Christians, the uncharitable spirit has prevailed, of unwarrantably circumscribing the terms of divine grace within a narrow circle of their own drawing. The one half of the Christian world has often doomed the other, without mercy, to eternal perdition. Without the pale of that church to which each sect belongs, they seem to hold it impossible for salvation to be attained. But is this the genuine spirit of the Gospel? Can a Christian believe the effects of the sufferings of Christ to be no greater than these? For this did the Son of God descend from the highest heavens, and pour out his soul unto the death, that only those who adopt the same modes of expression, and join in the same forms of worship with us,

might be brought to the kingdom of heaven? Is this all *the deliverance he has wrought upon the earth?* He was with child; he was in pain; and shall he not see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied? Surely, the Scripture has given us full ground to conclude, that the trophies of our Redeemer's grace shall correspond to the greatness of his power. *The Captain of our salvation shall bring many sons with himself to glory. The pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in his hand. He shall see his seed; He shall justify many. Men shall be blessed in him, and all nations shall call him blessed.* For our farther encouragement, let us observe,

III. THAT the heavenly society is represented in the Text, as gathered out of all the varieties of the human race. This is intimated by the remarkable expressions, of *a multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues*; as if designed on purpose to correct our narrow notions of the extent and power of divine grace. They whom distant seas and regions now divide, whose languages and manners are at present strange to one another, shall then mingle in the same assembly. No situation is so remote, and no station so unfavourable, as to preclude access to the heavenly felicity. A road is opened by the Divine Spirit to those blissful habitations, from all corners of the earth, and from all conditions of human life; from the peopled city, and from the solitary desert; from the cottages of the poor, and from the palaces of kings; from the dwellings of ignorance and simplicity, and from the regions of science and improvement. *They shall come, says our blessed Lord himself, from the east, and from the west, from the north, and from the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.**

Such discoveries serve both to enlarge our conceptions of the extent of divine goodness, and to remove those fears which are ready to arise from particular situations in life. Were you permitted to draw aside the veil, and to view that diversified assembly of the blessed who surround the throne, you would behold among them numbers who have overcome the same difficulties which encounter you, and which you dread as insuperable. You would behold there the uninstructed, with whom an upright intention supplied the place of knowledge; the feeble, whom divine grace had strengthened; and the misled, whom it had brought back into the right path. You would behold the young who had surmounted the allurements of youthful pleasure, and the old who had borne the distress of age with undecayed constancy; many whom want could not tempt to dishonesty; many whom riches did not seduce into pride or impiety; many who, in the most difficult and ensnaring circumstances, in the midst of camps and armies, and corrupted courts, had preserved unsullied integrity. In a word, *from all kindreds and people*; that is, from all ranks of life, and all tribes of men, even from among *publicans and sinners*, you would behold those whom Divine assistance had conducted to future glory.—And is not the same assistance, in its full extent, offered also to us? Encompassed, while we run the Christian race, with this *cloud of witnesses* who have finished

* Luke, xiii. 29.

their course with success; animated, while we *fight the good fight*, with the shouts of those who have overcome and are crowned, shall despair enervate or deject our minds? From the happy multitude above, there issues a voice which ought to sound perpetually in the ear of faith. *Be ye faithful unto the death, and ye shall receive the crown of life: Be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might: Be followers of us who, through faith and patience, are now inheriting the promises.* Consider,

IV. THE description given in the Text of the happiness and glory of the heavenly society. They were beheld by the Apostle *standing before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.* All that these *palms and white robes* import, it is not given us now to understand. We know that among all nations they have been used as ensigns of joy and victory; and are undoubtedly employed here to represent that distinguished felicity and honour to which human nature shall be then advanced. But we must be endowed with the faculties of the blessed, in order to comprehend their employments and pleasures; and therefore on this part of the subject I shall not attempt to enlarge. The silence of humble and respectful hope better becomes us, than the indulgence of those excursions of fancy, which degrade the subject they endeavour to exalt.

One circumstance only cannot fail to attract particular attention; That the blessed are here described as *standing before the throne, and before the Lamb*; that is, enjoying the immediate presence of the great Creator, and of the merciful Redeemer of the world. The unhappy distance at which we are now removed from God, is the source of all our woes. Those territories which we inhabit, are not His abode. They are regions of exile. They are the dwellings of a fallen race; and are condemned to be invested with clouds and darkness. Here, God standeth afar off. In vain we often pursue his presence through his works, his ways, and his religious institutions. He is said to be *a God that hideth himself. He dwelleth, as to us, in the secret place of thunder. He holdeth back the face of his throne, and spreadeth a thick cloud upon it.* The manifestation of his presence shall be the signal for the renovation of all things. When that *Sun of righteousness* breaks forth from the cloud which now conceals him, sorrow and sin, and every evil thing, shall fly away before the brightness of his face. For neither guilt nor misery can remain where God dwells. As the rising of the sun transforms at once the face of nature, and converts the whole extent of space, over which his beams are spread, into a region of light; so shall the divine presence, as soon as it is revealed, diffuse universal bliss over all who behold it. It imports *fulness of joy, and pleasure for evermore.* The inspired writer of this book thus describes its effects: *There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain: for the former things are passed away. He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more. But the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of water. God shall wipe away all*

tears from their eyes. But, descending from this too sublime theme, let us,

V. TURN our attention to a circumstance in the state of future happiness, more commensurate to our present conceptions, which is suggested by the commentary upon the words of the Text given in the sequel of the chapter. *And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes? and whence came they? And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said unto me, These are they which came out of great tribulation.** This explanatory circumstance may relate particularly to the case of those primitive sufferers who endured severe persecution in the cause of the gospel. But, in general, it presents this natural and beautiful view of the future felicity of good men, that it is their rest from the troubles and toils of life. For, to all, even to the happiest, human life is tribulation and conflict. No man is thoroughly at ease in his condition. Pursuits succeeding to pursuits keep us in constant agitation; while frequent returns of disappointment break our plans, and oppress our spirits. — Fatigued by such a variety of toils, mankind have ever looked forward to rest as their favourite object. Throughout all their ranks, from the highest to the lowest, they are in perpetual chace of it; and it perpetually flies before them. It is an object which here they are doomed always to seek, and never to enjoy.

The nature and laws of our present state admit not the gratification of this favourite wish. For, besides the necessity of trouble, in order to fulfil the purposes of discipline and improvement, our very happiness, such as it is in this world, requires a circulation of labours. Our enjoyment consists in pursuit, not in attainment. Attainment is with us, for most part, the grave of pleasure. Had we no object to excite fresh activity, and to impel us to new toils, human life would quickly stagnate in melancholy indolence. At the same time the current of all our wishes tends to repose. Imaginary forms float incessantly before our view, of the happiness which is to be enjoyed in rest: And from this conflict between our wishes on the one hand, and our actual situation on the other, arise much of the disquiet, and much of the infelicity, of human life. It is only in heaven that the tranquil repose, which on earth is no more than a pleasing phantom, shall be fully realized. *There, remaineth at last a rest for the people of God; rest from the disturbance of passion, the vanity of pursuit, and the vexation of disappointment; rest from all the sins and the sorrows of this miserable world; rest, which shall not be merely an indolent cessation from labour, but a full and satisfying enjoyment. Good men shall rest from their labours, and their works shall follow them. They have come out of great tribulation. They have fulfilled, with honour, their appointed course of trial. They have sat down in the seat of the Conqueror; and of past labours nothing remains but the pleasing review, and the happy fruits. There is still to be considered,*

VI. ON every material circumstance, descriptive both of the cha-

* Rev. vii. 13, 14.

racter, and of the happiness, of those who enjoy the heavenly bliss. Not only have *they come out of great tribulation*, but, as the Spirit of God adds in explaining the Text, *they have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.** Two things are here suggested; the sanctity of the blessed, and the means by which it is attained.

First, Their sanctity or purity is emblematically described, by their being clothed in *robes which are washed and made white*. In order to qualify human nature for the enjoyment of such happiness as I have endeavoured to describe, it must undergo a change so great, as to receive in Scripture the appellation of *a new birth*; a change to which all the institutions of religion, and all the operations of grace, contribute in this life, but which is not completed till the next. In this sanctity, or regeneration, consist not only the necessary preparations for future felicity, but which is not so commonly attended to, consists an essential part of that felicity itself. For whence arises the misery of this present world? It is not owing to our cloudy atmosphere, our changing seasons, and inclement skies. It is not owing to the debility of our bodies, or to the unequal distribution of the goods of fortune. Amidst all disadvantages of this kind, a pure, a steadfast, and enlightened mind, possessed of exalted virtue, could enjoy itself in peace, and smile at the impotent assaults of fortune and the elements. It is within ourselves that misery has fixed its seat. Our disordered hearts, our guilty passions, our violent prejudices, and misplaced desires, are the instruments of the torment which we endure. These sharpen the darts which adversity would otherwise point in vain against us. These are the *vials of wrath* which pour forth plagues on the inhabitants of the earth; and make the dwellings of nations become the abodes of woe. Thence discontent and remorse gnaw the hearts of individuals. Thence society is torn by open violence, or undermined by secret treachery; and man is transformed into a savage to man.

But suppose sin to be banished from the world; suppose perfect purity and charity to descend from heaven, and to animate every human breast; and you would behold the present habitation of men changed into the paradise of God. The undisturbed enjoyment of a holy mind, and of a blissful union with one another, would scarcely allow us to feel those external evils of which we now so loudly complain. All nature would assume a different appearance around us. That golden age, which was so long the subject of the philosopher's dream, and of the poet's song, would in fact take place. According to the beautiful language of ancient prophecy, *springs would then rise in the desert, and rivers be opened in the thirsty land. The wilderness and the solitary place would be glad. The wolf would dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid. Judgment would dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field. The desert would rejoice, and blossom as the rose.* — If such, even in this world, would be the effects of innocence and virtue completely restored, how much greater must they be in that *new earth*, and those *new*

heavens, where rectitude of nature shall be combined with every circumstance of external felicity? It is the present imperfect state of human virtue, that hinders us from conceiving fully the influence of righteousness upon happiness. The robes in which the best men are now clothed, to use the language of the Text, are sullied with so many stains, as to convey no adequate idea of the original beauty which belongs to the garb of righteousness. But when these stains shall be washed away, when these robes shall be made perfectly white and pure, a lustre will flow from them, of which we can, as yet, form no conception.

But how are the robes of the blessed thus washed? Whence is derived that spotless purity in which they are arrayed? The Spirit of God hath answered us, *from the blood of the Lamb*; leading our thoughts to that high dispensation of mercy, to which the saints above owe their establishment, first in grace, and then in glory. From that blood which was *shed for the remission of sins*, flow both the atonement of human guilt, and the regeneration of human nature. Human nature had fallen too low to be capable of retrieving itself. It could not regain its primitive innocence, and still less was capable of raising itself so high in the scale of existence, as to mingle with angels. We had neither sufficient knowledge to discover, nor virtue to merit, nor ability to qualify ourselves for enjoying, celestial glory. Heaven must have been either covered from our view by perpetual darkness, or only beheld from afar as an inaccessible region, if Christ had not interposed to *open for us a new and living way within the veil*. The obligations which his generous undertaking has conferred upon the human race, will tend highly to increase the felicity of the blessed. The sense of being distinguished by so illustrious a benefactor, and the corresponding returns of gratitude and love to him, form some of the most pleasing of those emotions which shall continue to delight them through all eternity.

From those views of a state of future happiness which the Text has suggested, various instructions relating to life and practice naturally arise. We are taught to rectify our notions of felicity; to look for it, not in what is external, but in what relates to the mind and heart; in good dispositions and a purified soul; in unity and friendship with one another; and in the divine presence and favour. If such things form the principal articles of future bliss, they cannot but be essential to our happiness in the more early periods of existence; and he who seeks his chief enjoyment from an opposite quarter, errs widely from the path which conducts to felicity.

We are farther taught whence to derive constancy and perseverance, amidst the present discouragements of a virtuous life. In this world, we often behold good men depressed, and the wicked prospering around us. Our best deeds meet with unjust returns from an ungrateful world. Sincerity is over-reached by craft, and innocence falls a victim to power. But let us not on such occasions say within ourselves, *that in vain we have cleansed our hearts, and washed our hands in innocency*. Let us rest on the assurance, that these disorders extend not far in the kingdom of God. They affect only the

first stage of existence. They relate to discipline and trial, which will soon be finished. In that permanent state which is about to open, a new and better order of things shall arise. When dejected with the evils of life, let us look up to that *happy multitude who have come out of great tribulation, and now stand before the throne*. Until the day arrive which shall join us to that blessed assembly, let us show ourselves worthy of the hope that is before us, by supporting, with a constant mind, the trials of our fidelity. *Be patient; stablish your hearts. The coming of the Lord draweth nigh.*

From the prospects which the Text has afforded, we may likewise learn what the spirit is which should regulate our life. Sanctity of conduct, dignity of character, elevation of affections, become those who expect to mingle with angels, and *spirits of just men made perfect*. I mean not that such prospects should carry away our whole attention from the present world, where undoubtedly lies the chief scene of human action, of human duty. But while we act as inhabitants of the earth, we ought at the same time so to remember our connection with a better world, as not to debase ourselves with what is mean, not to defile ourselves with what is impure, not to entangle ourselves among what is ensnaring, in the present state. Let neither its advantages elate, nor its disappointments deject us; but with an equal spirit, with a mind full of immortality, let us pass through all the changes of this mortal life.

Finally, Let the discoveries of future happiness inspire us with suitable gratitude to God and Christ; to the eternal Father, who originally decreed such rewards for the righteous; and to the Son, who acts in the high character of the Dispenser of the divine mercies, and the great Restorer of the fallen race of men. Particularly when approaching to God in solemn acts of devotion, such as we are at this day to perform, let gratitude be alive and ardent in our heart. The commemoration of our Saviour's death, is in a high degree suited to awaken every emotion of tenderness and love. It brings before us, under one view, all the obligations which we lie under to this great benefactor of mankind. When just ready to suffer for our sake, he instituted this holy sacrament, and said, *Do this in remembrance of me*. — Whom, O blessed Jesus! shall we ever remember, if we are capable of forgetting Thee? Thee, to whom we owe the forgiveness of sin, and the restoration of divine favour; our victory over death, and our hope of life eternal! Thou hast enlarged our views beyond these territories of disorders and darkness. Thou hast discovered to us the *city of the living God*. Thou settest open the gates of that *new Jerusalem*; and leadest us into the *path of life*. Thou from age to age gatherest *out of every nation, and kindred, and people, that multitude which stand before the throne*. Thou bringest them *out of great tribulation*. Thine are the *white robes* with which they are invested; thine, *the palms* which they bear; and by Thee they are placed under the light of the divine countenance for ever.

SERM. XXV.

ON CANDOUR.

1 COR. xiii. 5.

Charity — thinketh no evil.

RELIGION and Government are the two great foundations of order and comfort among mankind. Government restrains the outrages and crimes which would be subversive of society, secures the property, and defends the lives, of its subjects. But the defect of government is, that human laws can extend no farther than to the actions of men. Though they protect us from external violence, they leave us open on different sides to be wounded. By the vices which prevail in society, our tranquillity may be disturbed, and our lives in various ways embittered, while government can give us no redress. Religion supplies the insufficiency of law, by striking at the root of those disorders which occasion so much misery in the world. Its professed scope is to regulate, not actions alone, but the temper and inclinations. By this means it ascends to the sources of conduct; and very ineffectual would the wisest system of legislation prove for the happiness of mankind, if it did not derive aid from religion, in softening the dispositions of men, and checking many of those evil passions to which the influence of law cannot possibly reach.

We are led to this reflection by the description given in the context of charity, that great principle in the Christian system. The Apostle places it in a variety of lights, and under each of them explains its operation by its internal effects; not by the actions to which it gives rise, but by the dispositions which it produces in the heart. He justly supposes, that, if the temper be duly regulated, propriety of action will follow, and good order take place in external behaviour. Of those characters of charity I have chosen one for the subject of this Discourse, which leads to the consideration of a virtue highly important to us, both as Christians and as members of society. I shall endeavour, first, to explain the temper here pointed out, by showing what this description of charity imports, that *it thinketh no evil*; and then to recommend such a disposition, and to display the bad effects of an opposite turn of mind.

I. LET us consider what this description of charity imports. You will easily perceive that the expression in the Text is not to be understood in a sense altogether unlimited; as if there were no occasion on which we are to think unfavourably of others. To view all the actions of men with the same degree of complacency, would be contrary both to common understanding, and to many express precepts of religion. In a world where so much depravity abounds, were we to think and speak equally well of all, we must either be insensible of the distinction between right and wrong, or be indifferent to that distinction when we perceived it. Religion renders it our duty to *abhor that which is evil*; and, on many occasions, to express

our indignation openly against. But the Apostle, with great propriety, describes the temper which he is recommending, in such strong and general terms, as guard us against that extreme, to which we are naturally most prone, of rash and unjust suspicion. The virtue which he means to inculcate, is that which is known by the name of Candour; a virtue, which, as soon as it is mentioned, every one will acknowledge to be essential to the character of a worthy man; a virtue which we seldom fail of ascribing to any person whom we seek to recommend to the esteem of others; but which, I am afraid, when we examine our own conduct in a religious view, is seldom the subject of inquiry.

It is necessary to observe, that true Candour is altogether different from that guarded, inoffensive language, and that studied openness of behaviour, which we so frequently meet with among men of the world. Smiling, very often, is the aspect, and smooth are the words, of those who inwardly are the most ready to think evil of others. That Candour which is a Christian virtue, consists not in fairness of speech, but in fairness of heart. It may want the blandishment of external courtesy, but supplies its place with humane and generous liberality of sentiment. Its manners are unaffected, and its professions cordial. Exempt, on one hand, from the dark jealousy of a suspicious mind; it is no less removed, on the other, from that easy credulity which is imposed on by every specious pretence. It is perfectly consistent with extensive knowledge of the world, and with due attention to our own safety. In that various intercourse which we are obliged to carry on with persons of every different character, suspicion, to a certain degree, is a necessary guard. It is only when it exceeds the bounds of prudent caution, that it degenerates into vice. There is a proper mean between undistinguishing credulity and universal jealousy, which a sound understanding discerns, and which the man of candour studies to preserve.

He makes allowance for the mixture of evil with good, which is to be found in every human character. He expects none to be faultless; and he is unwilling to believe that there is any without some commendable quality. In the midst of many defects, he can discover a virtue. Under the influence of personal resentment, he can be just to the merit of an enemy. He never lends an open ear to those defamatory reports and dark suggestions, which, among the tribes of the censorious, circulate with so much rapidity, and meet with such ready acceptance. He is not hasty to judge, and he requires full evidence before he will condemn. As long as an action can be ascribed to different motives, he holds it as no mark of sagacity to impute it always to the worst. Where there is just ground for doubt, he keeps his judgment undecided; and, during the period of suspense, leans to the most charitable construction which an action can bear. When he must condemn, he condemns with regret; and without those aggravations which the severity of others adds to the crime. He listens calmly to the apology of the offender, and readily admits every extenuating circumstance which equity can suggest. How much soever he may blame the principles of any sect or party, he

never confounds, under one general censure, all who belong to that party or sect. He charges them not with such consequences of their tenets, as they refuse and disavow. From one wrong opinion, he does not infer the subversion of all sound principles; nor, from one bad action, conclude that all regard to conscience is overthrown. When he beholds the mole in his brother's eye, he remembers the beam in his own. He commiserates human frailty; and judges of others, according to the principles by which he would think it reasonable that they should judge of him. In a word, he views men and actions in the clear sunshine of charity and good-nature; and not in that dark and sullen shade which jealousy and party-spirit throw over all characters.—Such being, in general, the spirit of that charity which *thinketh no evil*, I proceed,

II. To recommend, by various arguments, this important branch of Christian virtue.

Let us begin with observing what a necessary requisite it is to the proper discharge of all the social duties. I need not spend time in showing that these hold a very high rank in the Christian system. The encomium which the Apostle in this chapter bestows upon charity, is alone sufficient to prove it. He places this grace at the head of all the gifts and endowments which can be possessed by man; and assures us, that *though we had all faith, so that we could remove mountains*, yet if we be destitute of charity, *it will profit us nothing*. Accordingly, *love, gentleness, meekness, and long-suffering*, are enumerated as distinguishing *fruits of the spirit of Christ*.^{*} But it is impossible for such virtues as these to find place in a breast, where the propensity to think evil of others is predominant. Charitable and candid thoughts of men are the necessary introduction to all good-will and kindness. They form, if we may speak so, the only climate in which love can grow up and flourish. A suspicious temper checks in the bud every kind affection. It hardens the heart, and estranges man from man. What friendship or gratitude can you expect from him, who views all your conduct with distrustful eyes, and ascribes every benefit you confer to artifice and stratagem? The utmost which you can hope from one of this character, is justice in his dealings—nor even that can you be assured of; as the suspicions to which he is a prey will afford him frequent pretexts for departing from truth, and for defending himself with the same arms which he conceives to be employed against him. Unhappy will they be who are joined with him by any close connexion; exposed to every malignant suspicion which arises in his own mind, and to every unjust suggestion which the malice of others may insinuate against them. That store of poison which is collected within him, frequently throws out its venom on all who are within its reach. As a companion, he will be severe and satirical; as a friend, captious and dangerous; in his domestic sphere, harsh, jealous, and irascible; in his civil capacity, seditious and turbulent, prone to impute the conduct of his superiours to improper motives, and upon loose information to condemn their conduct.

* Gal. v. 22, 23.

The contrary of all this may be expected from a candid temper. Whatever is amiable in manners, or useful in society, naturally and easily ingrafts itself upon it. Gentleness, humanity, and compassion, flow from it as their native spring. Open and cheerful in itself, it diffuses cheerfulness and good-humour over all who are under its influence. It is the chief ground of mutual confidence and union among men. It prevents those animosities from arising, which are the offspring of groundless prejudice; or, by its benign interposition, allays them when arisen. In the magistrate, it tempers justice with lenity. Among subjects, it promotes good order and submission. It connects humanity with piety. For he who is not given to think evil of his fellow-creatures, will not be ready to censure the dispensations of his Creator. Whereas the same turn of mind which renders one jealous, and unjust towards men, will incline him to be querulous and impious towards God.

In the second place, As a suspicious uncharitable spirit is inconsistent with all social virtue and happiness, so, in itself, it is unreasonable and unjust. In order to form sound opinions concerning characters and actions, two things are especially requisite, information and impartiality. But such as are most forward to decide unfavourably, are commonly destitute of both. Instead of possessing, or even requiring, full information, the grounds on which they proceed are frequently the most slight and frivolous. A tale, perhaps, which the idle have invented, the inquisitive have listened to, and the credulous have propagated, or a real incident which rumour, in carrying it along, has exaggerated and disguised, supplies them with materials of confident assertion, and decisive judgment. From an action, they presently look into the heart, and infer the motive. This supposed motive they conclude to be the ruling principle; and pronounce at once concerning the whole character.

Nothing can be more contrary both to equity and to sound reason, than such precipitate judgments. Any man who attends to what passes within himself, may easily discern what a complicated system the human character is, and what a variety of circumstances must be taken into the account, in order to estimate it truly. No single instance of conduct whatever, is sufficient to determine it. As from one worthy action, it were credulity, not charity, to conclude a person to be free from all vice; so from one which is censurable, it is perfectly unjust to infer that the author of it is without conscience and without merit. Did you know all the attending circumstances, it might appear in an excusable light; nay, perhaps, under a commendable form. The motives of the actor may have been entirely different from those which you ascribe to him; and, where you suppose him impelled by bad design, he may have been prompted by conscience and mistaken principle. Admitting the action to have been in every view criminal, he may have been hurried into it through inadvertency and surprise. He may have sincerely repented; and the virtuous principle may have now regained its full vigour. Perhaps this was the corner of frailty; the quarter on which he lay open

to the incursions of temptation ; while the other avenues of his heart were firmly guarded by conscience.

No error is more palpable than to look for uniformity from human nature ; though it is commonly on the supposition of it that our general conclusions concerning character are formed. Mankind are consistent neither in good nor in evil. In the present state of frailty, all is mixed and blended. The strongest contrarieties of piety and hypocrisy, of generosity and avarice, of truth and duplicity, often meet in one character. The purest human virtue is consistent with some vice ; and, in the midst of much vice and disorder, amiable, nay respectable, qualities may be found. There are few cases in which we have ground to conclude that all goodness is lost. At the bottom of the character there may lie some sparks of piety and virtue, suppressed, but not extinguished ; which, kept alive by the breath of Heaven, and gathering strength in secret from reflection, may, on the first favourable opening which is afforded them, be ready to break forth with splendour and force. — Placed, then, in a situation of so much uncertainty and darkness, where our knowledge of the hearts and characters of men is so limited, and our judgments concerning them are so apt to err, what a continual call do we receive, either to suspend our judgment, or to give it on the favourable side ? especially when we consider, that as, through imperfect information, we are unqualified for deciding soundly, so, through want of impartiality, we are often tempted to decide wrong. How much this enforces the argument for Candour will appear by considering,

In the third place, What the sources are of those severe and uncharitable opinions which we are so ready to form. Were the mind altogether free from prepossession and bias, it might avail itself to more advantage of the scanty knowledge which it possesses. But this is so far from being the case, that on every side we are encumbered with prejudices, and warped by passions, which exert their influence in nothing more than in leading us to think evil of others. At all times we are justly said to *see through a glass darkly* ; but passion and prejudice, looking through a glass which distorts the form of the objects, make us also see falsely.

It is one of the misfortunes of our present situation, that some of the good dispositions of human nature are apt to betray us into frailties and vices. Thus it often happens, that the laudable attachment which we contract to the country, or the church, to which we belong, or to some political denomination under which we class ourselves, both confines our affections within too narrow a sphere, and gives rise to violent prejudices against such as come under an opposite description. Not contented with being in the right ourselves, we must find all others in the wrong. We claim an exclusive possession of goodness and wisdom ; and, from approving warmly of those who join us, we proceed to condemn, with much acrimony, not only the principles, but the characters, of those from whom we differ. Hence persons of well-disposed minds are too often, through the strength of partial good affection, involved in the crime of uncharitable judgment.

They rashly extend to every individual the severe opinion which they have unwarrantably conceived of a whole body. — This man is of a party whose principles we reckon slavish; and therefore his whole sentiments are corrupted. That man belongs to a religious sect which we are accustomed to deem bigotted; and therefore he is incapable of any generous or liberal thought. Another is connected with a sect which we have been taught to account relaxed; and therefore he can have no sanctity. — Are these the judgments of candour and charity? Is true piety or virtue so very limited in its nature, as to be confined to such alone as see every thing with our eyes, and follow exactly the train of our ideas? Was there ever any great community so corrupt as not to include within it individuals of real worth?

Besides prepossessions of this nature, which sometimes mislead the honest mind, there are other, and much more culpable, causes of uncharitable judgment. Pride is hurt and wounded by every excellence in which it can claim no share; and, from eagerness to discover a blemish, rests upon the slightest appearance of one, as a satisfying proof. When rivalry and competition concur with pride, our desire to espy defects increases, and, by consequence, the grounds of censure multiply. Where no opposition of interests takes place, envy has too much influence in warping the judgment of many. Even when none of these causes operate, the inward consciousness of depravity is sufficient to fill the mind with evil thoughts of others. Whence should a man so readily draw his opinion of men as from that character with which he is best acquainted, because it is his own? A person of low and base mind naturally imputes to others the sentiments which he finds congenial to himself; and is incredulous of every excellency which to him is totally unknown. He enjoys, besides, consolation in the thought that others are no better than himself; that his weaknesses and crimes are those of all men; and that such as appear most distinguished for virtue, possess no real superiority, except greater dexterity in concealing their vices. Soothing themselves with this doctrine in secret, too many foster and strengthen the bad opinion which they entertain of all mankind. Rarely, if ever, have you ground to think well of that man's heart, who is, on every occasion, given to think the worst of others. Let us observe,

In the fourth place, That suitable to the sources whence a jealous and suspicious temper proceeds, are the effects which it produces in the world, the crimes and mischiefs with which it fills society. It possesses this unhappy distinction beyond the other failings of the human heart, that while it impels men to violent deeds, it justifies to their own apprehension the excesses which they commit. Amidst the uproar of other bad passions, conscience acts as a restraining power. As soon as the tumult subsides, remorse exerts its influence, and renders the sinner sensible of the evil which he has done. But the uncharitable man is unfortunately set loose from any such check or controul. Through the infatuation of prejudice, his judgment is perverted; conscience is misled; *the light within him is turned into*

darkness. Viewing the objects of his displeasure as evil men, he thinks himself entitled to give that displeasure full vent; and in committing the most inhuman actions, may sometimes imagine that he is doing good service to God.

The first fruits of an evil-thinking spirit are calumny and detraction, by which society is so often embroiled, and men are set at variance with one another. But, did it proceed no farther than censorious speech, the mischief would be less. Much greater and more serious evils frequently ensue. What direful effects, for instance, have often flowed from rash and ill-founded jealousy in private life! No sooner has one allowed that dæmon to take possession of his mind, than it perverts his understanding, and taints all his faculties. Haunting him by night and by day, bringing perpetually before him the odious and disquieting forms which it has raised up, it blackens every appearance to his view; gives to trifles, which are in themselves light as air, the weight of full confirmation; till what was at first a dubious surmise, or a slight displeasure, rises at length into full belief and implacable fury. Hence families torn with the most violent convulsions; the husband armed against the wife, the father against the son, the friend against the friend; the plan of treachery and assassination contrived, and the dagger plunged into the bosom of the innocent. — In public life, how often have kingdoms been shaken with all the violence of war and rebellion, from the unjust suspicions which subjects had conceived of their rulers; or the rash jealousy which princes had entertained of their people! — But it is in religious dissensions chiefly, that the mischievous power of uncharitable prejudice has displayed its full atrocity. Religion is always found to heighten every passion on which it acts, and to render every contest into which it enters, uncommonly ardent; because the objects which it presents are of such a nature, as strongly to seize and engage the human mind. When zeal for their own principles has prompted men to view those of a different persuasion in the odious lights which bigotry suggests, every sentiment of humanity has too often been extinguished. The mild influence of that religion which breathes nothing but gentleness, has proved too feeble to restrain the violent and bloody hand of persecution; and the uncharitable spirit, raging among contending parties, has filled the world with such calamities and crimes, as have brought disgrace on the Christian name.

Let us attend particularly to one awful instance of the guilt which men may contract, and of the ruin which they may bring upon themselves, through the want of fairness and candour. The nation of the Jews were almost noted for a narrow and uncharitable spirit. When John the Baptist, and our blessed Lord, appeared among them, because the former was austere in his temper, and retired in his life, they pronounced of him that he had an evil spirit; and, because the latter was open and sociable in his manners, they held him to be destitute of that sanctity which became a prophet. Their prejudice against our Lord took its first rise from a most frivolous and contemptible cause. *Is not this the son of the Carpenter? Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* When his miracles repelled this reproach, and

sufficiently proved the eminence of his character, still they fostered their prejudices by this most futile reasoning, *Have any of the rulers believed on him?* Obstinate in their attachment to a temporal Messiah, and continuing to view all our Saviour's conduct with an evil eye, when he conversed with bad men in order to reclaim them, they treated him as a *companion of publicans and sinners.* Because he disallowed their groundless traditions, they held him to be a breaker of the Sabbath, and a contemner of religion. Because he prophesied the destruction of their temple, they accused him of being an enemy to his own nation. Till at last, through their perpetual misconstruction of his actions, their passions became so inflamed as to make them cry out with one voice, *Away with this man to the death, and give us Barabbas the robber.* — Viewing in this dreadful event the consequences of want of candour, let every man tremble to think evil rashly of his brother. No one can tell how far uncharitable prejudices may carry him in guilt, if he allow them to harbour and gather strength within his breast. The cloud which *rose from the sea, no bigger than a man's hand*, may soon swell and spread, till it cover the whole horizon, and discharge with most destructive violence the gathered storm.

In the fifth place, As a suspicious spirit is the source of so many crimes and calamities in the world, so it is the spring of certain misery to the person who indulges it. His friends will be few; and small will be his comfort in those whom he possesses. Believing others to be his enemies, he will of course make them such. Let his caution be ever so great, the asperity of his thoughts will often break out in his behaviour; and, in return for suspecting and hating, he will incur suspicion and hatred. Besides the external evils which he draws upon himself, arising from alienated friendship, broken confidence, and open enmity; the suspicious temper itself is one of the worst evils which any man can suffer. *If in all fear there be torment*, how miserable must be his state who, by living in perpetual jealousy, lives in perpetual dread! Looking upon himself to be surrounded with spies, enemies, and designing men, he is a stranger to reliance and trust. He knows not to whom to open himself. He dresses his countenance in forced smiles, while his heart throbs within from apprehensions of secret treachery. Hence fretfulness and ill-humour, disgust at the world, and all the painful sensations of an irritated and embittered mind.

So numerous and great are the evils arising from a suspicious disposition, that of the two extremes it is more eligible to expose ourselves to occasional disadvantage from thinking too well of others, than to suffer continual misery by thinking always ill of them. It is better to be sometimes imposed upon, than never to trust. Safety is purchased at too dear a rate, when, in order to secure it, we are obliged to be always clad in armour, and to live in perpetual hostility with our fellows. This is, for the sake of living, to deprive ourselves of the comfort of life. The man of candour enjoys his situation, whatever it is, with cheerfulness and peace. Prudence directs his intercourse with the world; but no black suspicions haunt his hours

of rest. Accustomed to view the characters of his neighbours in the most favourable light, he is like one who dwells amidst those beautiful scenes of nature, on which the eye rests with pleasure. Whereas the suspicious man, having his imagination filled with all the shocking forms of human falsehood, deceit, and treachery, resembles the traveller in the wilderness, who discerns no objects around him but what are either dreary or terrible; caverns that open, serpents that hiss, and beasts of prey that howl. Hence in him are verified those descriptions which the Spirit of God has given us of the misery of the wicked. *They shall have no peace. They shall be like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest. The Lord shall give them a trembling heart, and failing of eyes, and sorrow of mind: And they shall fear day and night, and have none assurance of heart.*—I add,

IN the sixth and last place, That there is nothing which exposes men in a more marked and direct manner to the displeasure of the Almighty, than a malignant and censorious spirit. I insist not now on the general denunciations of divine wrath against malice and hatred. Let us only consider under what particular description the Spirit of God brings this crime of uncharitable judgment. It is declared to be an impious invasion of the prerogative of God, to whom alone it belongs to search all hearts, and to determine concerning all characters. This privilege He often appropriates expressly to Himself, on purpose to restrain the rashness of censure among men; requiring us to leave the judging of others to Him, and to attend to our own business and duty. *Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master, he standeth or falleth.* Judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who shall make manifest the counsels of the heart.†*

It deserves our most serious attention, that in several passages of Scripture, the great Judge of the world is represented, at the day of final retribution, as proceeding upon this principle, of rendering to men according to the manner in which they have acted towards their brethren. *With the merciful, thou wilt shew thyself merciful; and with the froward, thou wilt shew thyself froward.‡ With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.§* It is impossible to form an argument of more force than this, to restrain all severity of judgment among such as look forward to the tribunal of God. The argument extends not indeed so far, as to represent our acceptance with the Deity as entirely suspended upon the candour which we show in forming our sentiments of others. We know that other graces besides this are requisite, in order to fit us for heaven; and that without piety towards God, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, all our charity to men will be found defective and vain. But this we know also, that in the heart which is destitute of fairness and candour, the Spirit of God certainly dwells not; and that whatever appearances of religion the uncharitable man may assume, on him the Sovereign of the universe looks with no favour.—Thou who art a man full of frailties, who standest in need, not merely of impartiality in thy divine Judge, but of indulgence and mercy: Thou who implorest daily this mercy from

* Rom. xiv. 4.

† 1 Cor. iv. 5.

‡ Psalm xviii. 25, 26.

§ Matt. vii. 2.

Him, and prayest that He would *remember thou art dust*, and not be strict to *mark iniquity against thee*; darest thou, with those very prayers in thy mouth, proceed to judge without candour of thy brethren, and upon the slightest grounds to reprobate and condemn them? O thou hypocrite! (for by what other name can we call thee?) vain are all thy pretensions to piety. Ineffectual is every plea which thou canst form for mercy from Heaven. The precedent which thou hast established against thyself is decisive. Thou hast dictated the sentence of thine own condemnation.

ON the whole, it clearly appears that no part of the government of temper deserves attention more, than to keep our minds pure from uncharitable prejudices, and open to candour and humanity in judging of others. The worst consequences, both to ourselves and to society, follow from the opposite spirit. Let us beware of encouraging a habit of suspicions, by forming too severe and harsh opinions concerning human nature in general. A great proportion of infirmity and corruption, doubtless, adheres to it; yet tempered also it is with various mixtures of virtue and good affection. Darkened as the Divine Image now is among mankind, it is not wholly effaced. Much piety and goodness may lie hidden in hearts that are unknown to us. Vice is glaring and loud. The crimes of the wicked make a noise in the world, and alarm society. True worth is retired and modest, and requires particular situations to bring it forth to public notice. The prophet Elijah, in a time of prevailing corruption, imagined that all true religion had forsaken the land. *I, even I only*, said he to the Lord, *am left to serve thee*. But the Almighty, who discerned what was concealed from his imperfect view, replied, *Yet have I left me seven thousand men in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal*.*

The aged, and the unfortunate, who have toiled through an unsuccessful life with long experience of the falsehood and fraud of evil men, are apt to be the most severe in the opinions which they entertain of others. For such, their circumstances may be allowed to form some degree of apology. But if, in youth and prosperity, the same hard suspicious spirit prevail; if they who are beginning the career of life set out with all the scruples of distrust; if, before they have had reason to complain of the world, they betray the diffidence of a jealous, and the malignity of a censorious mind; sad is the presage which may thence be drawn of their future dishonour. From such, you have nothing to look for that shall be either engaging in private life, or respectable in public character. To youth it particularly belongs to be generous in sentiment, candid in opinion, undesigning in behaviour, open to the most favourable construction of actions and conduct. Throughout all the stages of life, candour is one of the most honourable distinctions of the human character: it is connected with magnanimity; it is justified by wisdom; it is suitable to the relation in which we stand to one another. But if reason and humanity be insufficient to restrain us from rash and uncharitable judgments, let that awful denunciation frequently resound in our ears, *He shall have judgment without mercy who hath shewed no mercy*.

* 1 Kings, xix. 18.

SERMON XXVI.

ON THE CHARACTER OF JOSEPH.

GEN. xlv. 5. 8.

Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither; for God did send me before you to preserve life. — So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God.

IN this generous manner, Joseph frames an apology for the unnatural behaviour of his brethren. He extenuates the atrocity of their crime, by representing the happy effects which it had produced. He looks beyond all second causes; and recognizes, in the wonderful events of his life, the hand of the Almighty. — No human character exhibited in the records of Scripture, is more remarkable and instructive than that of this patriarch. He is one whom we behold tried in all the vicissitudes of fortune; from the condition of a slave, rising to be ruler of the land of Egypt; and in every station acquiring, by his virtue and wisdom, favour with God and man. When overseer of Potiphar's house, his fidelity was proved by strong temptations, which he honourably resisted. When thrown into prison by the artifice of a false woman, his integrity and prudence soon rendered him conspicuous, even in that dark mansion. When called into the presence of Pharaoh, the wise and extensive plan which he formed for saving the kingdom from the miseries of impending famine, justly raised him to a high station, wherein his abilities were eminently displayed in the public service. But in his whole history there is no circumstance so striking and interesting, as his behaviour to his brethren, who had sold him into slavery. The moment in which he made himself known to them, that moment at which we are now to contemplate him, was the most critical one of his life, and the most decisive of his character. It is such as rarely occurs in the course of human events; and is calculated to draw the highest attention of all who are endowed with any degree of sensibility of heart. Let us consider the sentiment which Joseph utters in the Text under two views, each of which is very instructive to all Christians. I. As a discovery of his cordial forgiveness of his brethren; and, II. As an instance of his dutiful attention to the Providence of God.

I. THE most cordial forgiveness is here displayed. I shall not recapitulate all the preceding history respecting Joseph and his brethren; as it is well known by every one who has the least acquaintance with the sacred writings. From the whole tenour of the narration it appears, that though Joseph, upon the arrival of his brethren in Egypt, made himself strange to them, yet from the beginning he intended to discover himself; and studied so to conduct the discovery as might render the surprise of joy complete. For this end, by affected severity, he took measures for bringing down into Egypt all his father's children. They were now arrived there; and Benjamin among the rest, who was his younger brother by the same mother,

and was particularly beloved by Joseph. Him he threatened to detain; and seemed willing to allow the rest to depart. This incident renewed their distress. They all knew their father's extreme anxiety about the safety of Benjamin, and with what difficulty he had yielded to his undertaking this journey. Should he be prevented from returning, they dreaded that grief would overpower the old man's spirits, and prove fatal to his life. Judah, therefore, who had particularly urged the necessity of Benjamin's accompanying his brothers, and had solemnly pledged himself to their father for his safe return, craved, upon this occasion, an audience of the governor; and gave him a full account of the circumstances of Jacob's family.

Nothing can be more interesting and pathetic than this discourse of Judah, as it is recorded in the preceding chapter. Little knowing to whom he spoke, he paints, in all the colours of simple and natural eloquence, the distressed situation of the aged patriarch, hastening to the close of life; long afflicted for the loss of a favourite son, whom he supposed to have been torn in pieces by a beast of prey; labouring now under anxious concern about his youngest son, the child of his old age, who alone was left alive of his mother, and whom nothing but the calamities of severe famine could have moved a tender father to send from home, and expose to the dangers of a foreign land. *If we bring him not back with us, we shall bring down the grey hairs of thy servant, our father, with sorrow to the grave. I pray thee, therefore, let thy servant abide instead of the young man, a bondman to our lord. For how shall I go up to my father, and Benjamin not with me? lest I see the evil that shall come on my father.*

Upon this relation, Joseph could no longer restrain himself. The tender ideas of his father and his father's house, of his ancient home, his country and his kindred, of the distress of his family, and his own exaltation, all rushed too strongly upon his mind to bear any further concealment. *He cried, Cause every man to go out from me; and he wept aloud.* The tears which he shed, were not the tears of grief. They were the burst of affection. They were the effusions of a heart overflowing with all the tender sensibilities of nature. Formerly he had been moved in the same manner, when he first saw his brethren before him. *His bowels yearned upon them; he sought for a place where to weep. He went into his chamber; and then washed his face and returned to them.* At that period, his generous plans were not completed. But now, when there was no farther occasion for constraining himself, he gave free vent to the strong emotions of his heart. The first minister to the king of Egypt was not ashamed to show, that he felt as a man, and a brother. *He wept aloud, and the Egyptians and the house of Pharaoh heard him.*

The first words which his swelling heart allowed him to pronounce, are the most suitable to such an affecting situation which were ever uttered; — *I am Joseph; doth my father yet live?* — What could he, what ought he, in that impassioned moment, to have said more? This is the voice of nature herself, speaking her own language; and it penetrates the heart: No pomp of expression; no parade of kindness; but strong affection hastening to utter what it strongly

felt. *His brethren could not answer him ; for they were troubled at his presence.* Their silence is as expressive of those emotions of repentance and shame, which, on this amazing discovery, filled their breasts, and stopped their utterance, as the few words which Joseph speaks are expressive of the generous agitations which struggle for vent within him. No painter could seize a more striking moment for displaying the characteristical features of the human heart, than what is here presented. Never was there a situation of more tender and virtuous joy, on the one hand ; nor, on the other, of more overwhelming confusion and conscious guilt. In the simple narration of the sacred historian, it is set before us with greater energy and higher effect, than if it had been wrought up with all the colouring of the most admired modern eloquence.

When Joseph had a little recovered himself from the first transports of emotion, he proceeds to explain his situation to his brethren, and to show them the beneficent purposes for which he conceived himself to be raised by Providence into power. The apology which he makes in the Text for their former cruelty is uncommon and remarkable. *Now therefore be not grieved nor angry with yourselves that ye sold me hither ; for God did send me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth, and to save your lives by a great deliverance. So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God ; and he hath made me a father to Pharaoh, and lord of all his house, and a ruler throughout all the land of Egypt.* This apology was, in truth, no satisfactory excuse for their crime. For though the over-ruling Providence of Heaven had so directed the course of events, as to render their bad intentions subservient to a happy issue ; yet the badness of the intention originated entirely from themselves. The envy and jealousy which they entertained against their brother, led them to the commission of an atrocious deed. The deed was voluntary ; the crime was all their own ; and the interposition of Providence, in making unforeseen consequences follow from that crime, did not, could not exculpate them from guilt. It were an impious conclusion, that because God extracts good from our evil, we are not answerable for the evil which we perpetrate. *God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man.** But the sentiment in the Text is to be considered as a colour which the generous humanity of Joseph prompted him to throw on the conduct of his brethren. He saw the confusion with which they were overwhelmed in his presence. He diverts their attention from the remembrance of a crime which was now wringing their hearts with anguish, by representing to them the happy effects which that crime had produced. He sets them free from all uneasiness on his account. He calls upon them to rejoice in his prosperity ; and, instead of dwelling on a painful recollection of their own conduct, to join with him in acknowledging and adoring the hand of the Almighty.

How different is this amiable spirit which Joseph discovers, from that harsh and ostentatious superiority which too often accompanies the pretended forgiveness of injuries among those who call them-

selves Christians ! They are ready to say, that, for their part, they pardon the wrongs which have been done them ; they wish that the persons who have committed them may be able to forgive themselves ; they leave them to God and to their own conscience. By the severe suggestions which they throw out, they discover the inward bitterness of their spirit ; and artfully gratify resentment, at the time when they profess to exercise forgiveness. Whereas the great and good man, whose character we now consider, effaces all memory of the crimes which he pardons. He seeks to alleviate the remorse of his brethren by an extenuation of their guilt ; and, while he is preparing to make their circumstances comfortable, studies at the same time to render their minds easy and tranquil.

This was not merely a transient emotion with Joseph, owing to the first burst of affection on discovering himself to his brethren. We have a clear proof, from a remarkable transaction which passed many years after this period, of his disposition continuing the same to the end of life. It is recorded in the last chapter of this book, that when Jacob died, his sons began to be seized with fear concerning the treatment which they might receive from their brother. The guilty are always suspicious. Conscious of their own baseness, they are incapable of conceiving the magnanimity of others. They saw the bond, which held the family together, now broken by their father's death. They dreaded that the resentment of Joseph against them had hitherto been only suppressed, or concealed. *They said among themselves, Peradventure he will now hate us, and requite all the evil which we did unto him.* Under this apprehension, they first sent a humble message to deprecate his displeasure by the memory of their common father ; and then appearing in his presence, they fell down before his face, professing themselves to be his servants, and praying him to forgive the trespass which they had committed against him. But no such hidden resentment as they dreaded had ever lurked in the soul of Joseph. On the contrary, when he beheld his brethren in this affecting situation, bereaved of their ancient protector, and reduced, as they imagined, to the necessity of holding up their hands to him for mercy, he was overpowered by a tide of tender emotions. *Joseph wept while his brethren spake unto him.* These affectionate tears alone were sufficient to have assured them of his forgiveness. But hastening also by words to dispel their alarms, he presently added, *Fear not ; for, though ye thought evil against me, God meant it unto good. Now therefore fear ye not ; I will nourish you, and your little ones. And he comforted them, and spake kindly unto them.**

Such was the last incident that is recorded in the life of this eminent personage, than whom you will find few more distinguished by an assemblage of illustrious virtues ; in the lowest adversity, patient and faithful ; in the highest prosperity, beneficent and generous ; dutiful and affectionate as a son ; kind and forgiving as a brother ; accomplished as a statesman ; wise and provident as a ruler of the land. In such a character you behold human nature possessing its

* Gen. l. 21.

highest honours. The sentiments which it inspires tend to enoble our minds; and to prevent their imbibing the spirit of those hard, interested, and self-seeking men with whom the world abounds.

THE striking example of forgiveness which the Text displays, ought frequently to occur to our thoughts, amidst the various occasions of provocation and offence which arise in our intercourse with the world. If one so worthy and amiable, in the days too of his youth and innocence, suffered such cruel treatment from his brothers, ought we to be surprised if, even from our nearest relations, we meet with injustice or ingratitude? Wrongs and injuries are, more or less, the portion of all. Like Death, they are an evil unavoidable. No station is so high, no power so great, no character so unblemished, as to exempt us from them. In the world, ungrateful men, false friends, and violent enemies, abound. Every wise man ought to prepare himself for what he is to encounter in passing through this thorny region. He is not to expect that he can *gather grapes from thistles*; nor to lose the government of his mind, because, in the midst of evil men, he is not allowed to remain, like a secret and inviolable person, untouched and uninjured.

As this view of our situation ought to blunt the edge of passion and impatience, so the alleviating circumstances which reason will suggest, ought to mollify resentment. Think of the various constructions which the actions of men will bear. Consider how different the motives of him who hath given us offence, may have been from those which, in the heat of passion, we ascribe to him; how apt all men are to be seduced by mistaken views of interest, and how little ground we have to complain, if, upon a supposed interfering of interests, we suffer by others preferring their own to ours. Remember that no opinions which you form under the power of resentment can be depended upon as just; and that every one loads the intentions of his enemy with imaginary degrees of malice.

But, admitting the injury you have received to be ever so atrocious in its nature, and aggravated in its circumstances; supposing it to be even parallel to that which Joseph suffered; look up, like him, to that divine government under which we are all placed. If forgiveness be a duty which we know God to have required under the most awful sanctions, dare we draw upon ourselves the merited vengeance of that Superiour to whose clemency we are obliged daily to fly? When, with hard and unrelenting dispositions towards our brethren, we send up to Heaven prayers for mercy to ourselves, those prayers return like imprecations upon our heads; and our very devotions seal our condemnation.

The most plain and natural sentiments of equity concur with divine authority to enforce the duty which I now recommend. Let him who has never in his life done wrong, be allowed the privilege of remaining inexorable. But let such as are conscious of frailties and crimes, consider forgiveness as a debt which they owe to others. Common failings are the strongest lesson of mutual forbearance. Were this virtue unknown among men, order and comfort, peace and repose, would be strangers to human life. Injuries retaliated accord-

ing to the exorbitant measure which passion prescribes, would justify resentment in return. The injured person would become the injurer; and thus wrongs, retaliations, and fresh injuries, would circulate in endless succession, till the world was rendered a field of blood. Of all the passions which invade the human breast, revenge is the most direful. When allowed to reign with full dominion, it is more than sufficient to poison the few pleasures which remain to man in his present state. How much soever a person may suffer from injustice, he is always in hazard of suffering more from the prosecution of revenge. The violence of an enemy cannot inflict what is equal to the torment he creates to himself, by means of the fierce and desperate passions which he allows to rage in his soul.

Those evil spirits who inhabit the regions of misery, are represented as delighting in revenge and cruelty. But all that is great and good in the universe, is on the side of clemency and mercy. The Almighty Ruler of the world, though for ages offended by the unrighteousness, and insulted by the impiety of men, is *long-suffering, and slow to anger*. His Son, when he appeared in our nature, exhibited, both in his life and his death, the most illustrious example of forgiveness which the world ever beheld. If you look into the history of mankind, you will find that, in every age, those who have been respected as worthy, or admired as great, have been distinguished for this virtue. Revenge dwells in little minds. A noble and magnanimous spirit is always superiour to it. It suffers not from the injuries of men those severe shocks which others feel. Collected within itself, it stands unmoved by their impotent assaults; and, with generous pity, rather than with anger, looks down on their unworthy conduct. It has been truly said, that the greatest man on earth can no sooner commit an injury, than a good man can make himself greater, by forgiving it. Joseph, at the moment when we now contemplate him, had entirely under his power all those unnatural brethren who had been guilty towards him of the most cruel outrage which men could perpetrate. He could have retained them for ever in that Egyptian bondage to which they had once consigned him; and have gratified revenge by every accumulation of disgrace which despotic power enabled him to inflict. Had he acted this part, he might for a while have been soothed by the pleasures of his high station; but remorse, in the end, would have stung his soul. Cruelty would have rendered him unhappy within himself, as well as odious to others, and his name would have perished among the crowd of those contemptible statesmen whose actions stain the annals of history. Whereas now, his character stands among the foremost in the ranks of spotless fame. His memory is blessed to all generations. His example continues to edify the world, and he himself shines in the celestial regions, *as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars, for ever and ever*. Let us now,

II. CONSIDER the sentiment contained in the Text, not only as a discovery of cordial forgiveness, but as an expression of devout attention to the conduct of Providence. *So now it was not you that sent me hither, but God*. Remark how beautifully piety and humanity

are, in this instance, connected together. As we are told of Cornelius, the good Centurion, that *his prayers and his alms, his devotion and his good works, came up together in memorial before God*; so here we perceive fraternal affection and religious reverence, mingling in one emotion within the patriarch's heart. In a person of low and vulgar mind, the sensations on such an occasion would have been extremely different. Looking back on the past events of his life, he would have ascribed all the adversity which he had suffered to the perverse treatment of his brothers; and all the prosperity which he afterwards attained, to his own good conduct and wisdom; and by consequence would have remained embittered against the instruments of the one, and filled with pride and self-sufficiency on account of the other. But the elevated and noble mind of Joseph rejected such unworthy sentiments. Contemplating the hand of God in all that had befallen him, he effaced the remembrance of those evil deeds which had produced his adversity; and for his prosperity he affected no praise to himself, but ascribed it entirely to the will of Heaven. Let us take notice, that this is not the reflection of a private, retired man, whose situation might be supposed to favour such devout meditations. It is the reflection of one, who was leading a busy and a seducing life, in the midst of a court; the favourite of the greatest monarch who was then known in the world. Yet him you behold, amidst the submission and adulation which was paid to him, preserving the moderation and simplicity of a virtuous mind; and, amidst the idolatry and false philosophy of the Egyptians, maintaining the principles of true religion, and giving glory to the God of Israel.

From this unity of piety with humanity, which is so conspicuous in the sentiments of Joseph, there arises one very important instruction; that a devout regard to the hand of God in the various events of life, tends to promote good dispositions and affections towards men. It will be found by those who attend to the workings of human nature, that a great proportion of those malignant passions which break out in the intercourse of men, arises from confining their attention wholly to second causes, and overlooking the first cause of all. Hence, they are insolent in prosperity, because they discern nothing higher than their own abilities; and in adversity they are peevish and unforgiving, because they have no object on which to fix their view, but the conduct of men who have acted as their enemies. They behold no plan of wisdom or goodness carried on throughout nature, which can allay the discomposure of their mind. As soon as their temper is ruffled, the world appears to them to be a continued scene of disasters and injuries, of confused events, and of unreasonable men. Whereas, to the pious man, the contemplation of the universe exhibits a very different spectacle. In the midst of seeming confusion he traces a principle of order; and by attention to that order, his mind is harmonized and calmed. He beholds a wise and righteous Governour presiding over all the commotions which are raised by the tumult of conflicting passions and interests; guiding, with imperceptible influence, the hand of the violent to beneficent purposes; accomplishing unexpected ends by the most improbable means; obliging

the wrath of men to praise him; sometimes humbling the mighty, sometimes exalting the low; often snaring the wicked in the devices which their hands have wrought. Respectful acknowledgment of this divine government, controuls the disorders of inferiour passions. Reverence for the decrees of Heaven inspires patience and moderation. Trust in that perfect wisdom and goodness which directs all for the best, diminishes the shock which worldly disasters occasion. The irritation of passion and resentment will always bear proportion to the agitation which we suffer from the changes of fortune. One who connects himself with nothing but second causes, partakes of the violence and irregularity of all the inferiour movements belonging to this great machine. He who refers all to God, dwells, if we may speak so, in that higher sphere where motion begins; he is subject to fewer shocks and concussions, and is only carried along by the motion of the universe.

How can mildness or forgiveness gain place in the temper of that man, who, on occasion of every calamity which he suffers from the ill usage of others, has no sanctuary within his own breast to which he can make retreat from their vexations; who is possessed of no principle which is of sufficient power to bear down the rising tide of peevish and angry passions? The violence of an enemy, or the ingratitude of a friend, the injustice of one man, and the treachery of another, perpetually dwell and rankle in his thoughts. The part which they have acted in bringing on his distress, is frequently more grating to him than the distress itself. Whereas he who in every event looks up to God, has always in his view a great and elevating object which inspires him with magnanimity. His mind lies open to every relieving thought, and is inclined to every suggestion of generosity. He is disposed to say with Joseph, *It was not you that sent me hither, but God; with David, It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth good in his eyes; and, with a greater personage than either of these, The cup which my Father hath given me to drink, shall I not drink it?* Hence arises superiority to many of the ordinary provocations of the world. For he looks upon the whole of his present life as part of a great plan, which is carried on under the direction of Heaven. In this plan he views men as acting their several parts, and contributing to his good or evil. But their parts he considers as subordinate ones; which, though they may justly merit his affection, and may occasionally call forth his resentment, yet afford no proper foundation to violent or malignant passion. He looks upon bad men as only the rod with which the Almighty chastens; like the pestilence, the earthquake, or the storm. In the midst of their injustice and violence he can pity their blindness; and imitate our blessed Lord in praying, *Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*

SERMON XXVII.

ON THE CHARACTER OF HAZAEL.

2 KINGS, viii. 12, 13.

And Hazael said, Why weepeth my Lord? And he answered, Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel. Their strong holds wilt thou set on fire, and their young men wilt thou slay with the sword, and wilt dash their children, and rip up their women with child. And Hazael said, But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha answered, The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.

IN the days of Joram, king of Israel, flourished the prophet Elisha. His character was so eminent, and his fame so widely spread, that Benhadad, the king of Syria, though an idolater, sent to consult him concerning the issue of a distemper which threatened his life. The messenger employed on this occasion was Hazael, who appears to have been one of the princes, or chief men, of the Syrian court. Charged with rich gifts from the king, he presents himself before the Prophet, and accosts him in terms of the highest respect. During the conference which they held together, Elisha fixed his eye steadfastly on the countenance of Hazael; and discerning, by a prophetic spirit, his future tyranny and cruelty, he could not contain himself from bursting into a flood of tears. When Hazael, in surprise, inquired into the cause of this sudden emotion, the Prophet plainly informs him of the crimes and barbarities which he foresaw that hereafter he should commit. The soul of Hazael abhorred, at this time, the thoughts of cruelty. Uncorrupted, as yet, by ambition or greatness, his indignation arose at being thought capable of such savage actions as the Prophet had mentioned; and, with much warmth, he replies, *But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* Elisha makes no return but to point out a remarkable change which was to take place in his condition; *The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.* In course of time, all that had been predicted came to pass. Hazael ascended the throne; and ambition took possession of his heart. *He smote the children of Israel in all their coasts. He oppressed them during all the days of king Jehoram**; and, from what is left on record of his actions, plainly appears to have proved what the Prophet foresaw him to be, a man of violence, cruelty, and blood.

In this passage of history, an object is presented which deserves our serious attention. We behold a man who, in one state of life, could not look upon certain crimes without surprise and horror; who knew so little of himself, as to believe it impossible for him ever to be concerned in committing them; that same man, by a change of condition, transformed in all his sentiments; and, as he rose in greatness, rising also in guilt; till at last, he completed that whole cha-

* 2 Kings, xiii. 22.

acter of iniquity which he once detested. Hence the following observations naturally arise. I. That to a mind not entirely corrupted, sentiments of abhorrence at guilt are natural. II. That, notwithstanding those sentiments, the mind may be brought under the dominion of the vices which it had most abhorred. III. That this unhappy revolution is frequently owing to a change of men's external circumstances and condition in the world. These observations are to make the subject of the present Discourse; and will lead us to such a view of human nature, as, it is hoped, may be of general use.

I. SENTIMENTS of abhorrence at guilt are natural to the human mind. Hazael's reply to the Prophet, shews how strongly he felt them. *Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?* Is he, or can he ever be so base and wretched, as to perpetrate crimes which would render him unworthy of bearing the name of a man? This is the voice of human nature, while it is not as yet hardened in iniquity. Some vices are indeed more odious to the mind than others. Providence has wisely pointed the sharpest edge of this natural aversion against the crimes which are of most pernicious and destructive nature; such as treachery, oppression, and cruelty. But, in general, the distinction between moral good and evil is so strongly marked, as to stamp almost every vice with the character of turpitude. Present to any man, even the most ignorant and untutored, an obvious instance of injustice, falsehood, or impiety; let him view it in a cool moment, when no passion blinds, and no interest warps him; and you will find that his mind immediately revolts against it, as shameful and base, nay, as deserving punishment. Hence, in reasoning on the characters of others, however men may mistake as to facts, yet they generally praise and blame according to the principles of sound morality.

With respect to their own character, a notorious partiality too generally misleads their judgment. But it is remarkable, that no sinner ever avows directly to himself, that he has been guilty of gross and downright iniquity. Even when engaged by his passions in the commission of the greatest crimes, he always palliates them to his own mind by some extenuation or apology, some pretended necessity, or some borrowed colour of innocence. Such power the undeniable dignity of virtue, and the acknowledged turpitude of vice, possesses over every human heart. These sentiments are the remaining impressions of that law, which was originally written on the mind of man. They are gleams of that light which once shone clear and strong within us; and which, though it be now greatly obscured, yet continues to shoot a feeble ray athwart the darkness of human nature. — But whatever sentiments of abhorrence at vice we may at any time entertain, we have no reason to build upon these presumptuous confidence of our continuance in virtue. For the next instruction which the Text suggests, is,

II. THAT such is man's ignorance of his own character, such the frailty of his nature, that he may one day become infamous for those very crimes which at present he holds in detestation. This observ-

ation is too well verified by the history of Hazael; and a thousand other instances might be brought to confirm it. Though there is nothing which every person ought to know so thoroughly as his own heart, yet from the conduct of men it appears, that there is nothing with which they are less acquainted. Always more prone to flatter themselves than desirous to discover the truth, they trust to their being possessed of every virtue which has not been put to the trial; and reckon themselves secure against every vice to which they have not hitherto been tempted. As long as their duty hangs in speculation, it appears so plain, and so eligible, that they cannot doubt of performing it. The suspicion never enters their mind, that in the hour of speculation, and in the hour of practice, their sentiments may differ widely. Their present disposition they easily persuade themselves will ever continue the same; and yet that disposition is changing with circumstances every moment.

The man who glows with the warm feelings of devotion, imagines it impossible for him to lose that sense of the divine goodness which at present melts his heart. He whom his friend had lately saved from ruin, is confident that, if some trying emergency shall put his gratitude to proof, he will rather die than abandon his benefactor. He who lives happy and contented in frugal industry, wonders how any man can give himself up to dissolute pleasure. Were any of those persons informed by a superiour spirit, that the time was shortly to come when the one should prove an example of scandalous impiety, the other of treachery to his friend, and the third of all that extravagant luxury which disgraces a growing fortune; each of them would testify as much surprise and abhorrence as Hazael did, upon hearing the predictions of the Prophet. Sincere they might very possibly be in their expressions of indignation; for hypocrisy is not always to be charged on men whose conduct is inconsistent. Hazael was in earnest, when he resented with such ardour the imputation of cruelty. The Apostle Peter was sincere, when he made the zealous profession, that though he should go to prison and to death with his Master, he would never deny him. They were sincere; that is, they spoke from the fulness of their hearts, and from the warmth of the present moment; but they did not know themselves, as the events which followed plainly shewed. So false to its principles, too frequently, is the heart of man; so weak is the foundation of human virtue; so much reason there is for what the Gospel perpetually inculcates concerning the necessity of distrusting ourselves, and depending on divine aid. Mortifying, I confess, is this view of human nature; yet proper to be attended to by all, in order to escape the most fatal dangers. For, merely through unguarded conduct, and from the want of this prudent suspicion of their own weakness, how many after the most promising beginnings, have gradually apostatized from every principle of virtue; until, at last, it has become as difficult for one to believe, that they ever had any love of goodness, as it would have been once to have persuaded themselves that they were to advance to such a height in wickedness!

In such cases as I have described, what has become, it may be

inquired, of those sentiments of abhorrence at guilt, which were once felt so strongly? Are they totally erased? or, if in any degree they remain, how do such persons contrive to satisfy themselves in acting a part which their minds condemn?—Here, there is a mystery of iniquity which requires to be unfolded. Latent and secret is the progress of corruption within the soul; and the more latent, the more dangerous is its growth. No man becomes of a sudden completely wicked. Guilt never shows its whole deformity at once; but by gradual acquaintance reconciles us to its appearance, and imperceptibly diffuses its poison through all the powers of the mind. Every man has some darling passion, which generally affords the first introduction to vice. The irregular gratifications into which it occasionally seduces him, appear under the form of venial weaknesses; and are indulged, in the beginning, with scrupulousness and reserve. But, by longer practice, these restraints weaken, and the power of habit grows. One vice brings in another to its aid. By a sort of natural affinity they connect and entwine themselves together; till their roots come to be spread wide and deep over all the soul. When guilt rises to be glaring, conscience endeavours to remonstrate. But conscience is a calm principle. Passion is loud and impetuous; and creates a tumult which drowns the voice of reason. It joins, besides, artifice to violence; and seduces at the same time that it impels. For it employs the understanding to impose upon the conscience. It devises reasons and arguments to justify the corruptions of the heart. The common practice of the world is appealed to. Nice distinctions are made. Men are found to be circumstanced in so peculiar a manner, as to render certain actions excusable, if not blameless, which, in another situation, it is confessed, would have been criminal. By such a process as this, there is reason to believe, that a great part of mankind advance from step to step in sin, partly hurried by passion, and partly blinded by self-deceit, without any just sense of the degree of guilt which they contract. By inveterate habits, their judgment is at length perverted, and their moral feelings are deadened. They see now with other eyes; and can look without pain on evil actions which they formerly abhorred.

It is proper, however, to observe, that though our native sentiments of abhorrence at guilt may be so borne down, or so eluded, as to lose their influence on conduct, yet those sentiments belonging originally to our frame, and being never totally eradicated from the soul, will still retain so much authority, as, if not to reform, at least, on some occasions, to chasten the sinner. It is only during a course of prosperity, that vice is able to carry on its delusions without disturbance. But, amidst the dark and thoughtful situations of life, conscience regains its rights; and pours the whole bitterness of remorse on his heart, who has apostatized from his original principles. We may well believe that, before the end of his days, Hazael's first impressions would be made to return. In the hour of adversity, the remembrance of his conference with the venerable Prophet would sting his heart. Comparing the sentiments which, in those his better days, he felt, with the atrocious cruelties which he had afterwards

committed, all the honours of royalty would be unable to save him from the inward sense of baseness and infamy.

FROM this view which has been exhibited of the progress of corruption, and of the danger to which we are exposed, of falling from principles which once appeared firmly established, let us receive useful admonition for our own conduct. *Let not him that girdeth on his harness, boast like him that putteth it off.* Let no man place a rash and dangerous confidence in his virtue. *But let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.* Never adventure on too near an approach to what is evil. Familiarize not yourselves with it, in the slightest instances, without fear. Listen with reverence to every reprehension of conscience; and preserve the most quick and accurate sensibility to right and wrong. If ever your moral impressions begin to decay, and your natural abhorrence of guilt to lessen, you have ground to dread that the ruin of virtue is fast approaching. While you employ all the circumspection and vigilance which reason can suggest, let your prayers, at the same time, continually ascend to God for support and aid. Remember that from him *descendeth every good and perfect gift*; and that to him only it *belongs to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.* I proceed now to the

III^d OBSERVATION from the Text, That the power which corruption acquires to pervert the original principles of man, is frequently owing to a change of their circumstances and condition in the world. How different was Hazael the messenger of Benhadad, from Hazael the king; he who started at the mention of cruelty, from him who waded in blood! Of this sad and surprising revolution, the Prophet emphatically assigns the cause in these few words; *The Lord hath shewed me that thou shalt be king over Syria.* That crown, that fatal crown, which is to be set upon thy head, shall shed a malignant influence over thy nature; and shall produce that change in thy character, which now thou canst not believe. — Whose experience of the world is so narrow, as not to furnish him with instances similar to this, in much humbler conditions of life? So great is the influence of a new situation of external fortune; such a different turn it gives to our temper and affections, to our views and desires, that no man can foretel what his character would prove, should Providence either raise or depress his circumstances in a remarkable degree, or throw him into some sphere of action, widely different from that to which he has been accustomed in former life.

The seeds of various qualities, good and bad, lie in all our hearts. But until proper occasions ripen and bring them forward, they lie there inactive and dead. They are covered up and concealed within the recesses of our nature; or, if they spring up at all, it is under such an appearance as is frequently mistaken, even by ourselves. Pride, for instance, in certain situations, has no opportunity of displaying itself but as magnanimity, or sense of honour. Avarice appears as necessary and laudable oeconomy. What in one station of life would discover itself to be cowardice and baseness of mind, passes in another for prudent circumspection. What in the fulness of power would

prove to be cruelty and oppression, is reputed, in a subordinate rank, no more than the exercise of proper discipline. For a while, the man is known neither by the world nor by himself, to be what he truly is. But bring him into a new situation of life, which accords with his predominant disposition; which strikes on certain latent qualities of his soul, and awakens them into action; and as the leaves of a flower gradually unfold to the sun, so shall all his true character open full to view.

This may, in one light, be accounted not so much an alteration of character produced by a change of circumstances, as a discovery brought forth of the real character, which formerly lay concealed. Yet, at the same time, it is true that the man himself undergoes a change. For opportunity being given for certain dispositions, which had been dormant, to exert themselves without restraint, they of course gather strength. By means of the ascendancy which they gain, other parts of the temper are borne down; and thus an alteration is made in the whole structure and system of the soul. He is a truly wise and good man, who, through divine assistance, remains superiour to this influence of fortune on his character, who having once imbibed worthy sentiments, and established proper principles of action, continues constant to these, whatever his circumstances be; maintains, throughout all the changes of his life, one uniform and supported tenour of conduct; and what he abhorred as evil and wicked in the beginning of his days, continues to abhor to the end. But how rare is it to meet with this honourable consistency among men, while they are passing through the different stations and periods of life! When they are setting out in the world, before their minds have been greatly misled or debased, they glow with generous emotions, and look with contempt on what is sordid and guilty. But advancing farther in life, and inured by degrees to the crooked ways of men; pressing through the crowd, and the bustle of the world; obliged to contend with this man's craft, and that man's scorn; accustomed, sometimes, to conceal their sentiments, and often to stifle their feelings, they become at last hardened in heart, and familiar with corruption. Who would not drop a tear over this sad, but frequent fall of human probity and honour? Who is not humbled, when he beholds the refined sentiments and high principles on which we are so ready to value ourselves, brought to such a shameful issue; and man, with all his boasted attainments of reason, discovered so often to be the creature of his external fortune, moulded and formed by the incidents of his life?

THE instance of Hazael's degeneracy leads us to reflect, in particular, on the dangers which arise from stations of power and greatness; especially when the elevation of men to these has been rapid and sudden. Few have the strength of mind which is requisite for bearing such a change with temperance and self-command. The respect which is paid to the great, and the scope which their condition affords for the indulgence of pleasure, are perilous circumstances to virtue. When men live among their equals, and are accustomed to encounter the hardships of life, they are of course reminded of their mutual dependence on each other, and of the de-

pendence of all upon God. But when they are highly exalted above their fellows, they meet with few objects to awaken serious reflection, but with many to feed and inflame their passions. They are apt to separate their interest from that of all around them; to wrap themselves up in their vain grandeur; and, in the lap of indolence and selfish pleasure, to acquire a cold indifference to the concerns even of those whom they call their friends. The fancied independence into which they are lifted up, is adverse to sentiments of piety, as well as of humanity, in their heart. *Taking the timbrel and the harp, and rejoicing at the sound of the organ, they say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty, that we should serve him? or what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him?*

But we are not to imagine, that elevated stations in the world furnish the only formidable trials to which our virtue is exposed. It will be found, that we are liable to no fewer nor less dangerous temptations, from the opposite extreme of poverty and depression. When men who have known better days are thrown down into abject situations of fortune, their spirits are broken and their temper soured. Envy rankles in their breast at such as are more successful. The providence of Heaven is accused in secret murmurs; and the sense of misery is ready to push them into atrocious crimes, in order to better their state. Among the inferiour classes of mankind, craft and dishonesty are too often found to prevail. Low and penurious circumstances depress the human powers. They deprive men of the proper means of knowledge and improvement; and where ignorance is gross, it is always in hazard of engendering profligacy.

Hence it has been, generally, the opinion of wise men in all ages, that there is a certain middle condition of life, equally remote from either of those extremes of fortune, which, though it want not also its own dangers, yet is, on the whole, the state most favourable both to virtue and to happiness. For there, luxury and pride on the one hand, have not opportunity to enervate or intoxicate the mind, nor want and dependence on the other, to sink and debase it; there, all the native affections of the soul have the freest and fairest exercise, the equality of men is felt, friendships are formed, and improvements of every sort are pursued with most success; there, men are prompted to industry, without being overcome by toil, and their powers called forth into exertion, without being either superseded by too much abundance, or baffled by insuperable difficulties; there, a mixture of comforts and of wants, at once awakens their gratitude to God, and reminds them of their dependence on his aid; and, therefore, in this state, men seem to enjoy life to most advantage, and to be least exposed to the snares of vice. Such a condition is recorded in the book of Proverbs, to have been the wish and choice of one who was eminent for wisdom. *Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me. Lest I be full, and deny Thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.**

* PROV. XXX. 8, 9.

From the whole view which we have now taken of the subject, we may, in the first place, learn the reasons for which a variety of conditions and ranks was established by Providence among mankind. This life is obviously intended to be a state of probation and trial. No trial of characters is requisite with respect to God, who sees what is in every heart, and perfectly knows what part each man would act, in all the possible situations of fortune. But on account of men themselves, and of the world around them, it was necessary that trial should take place, and a discrimination of characters be made; in order that true virtue might be separated from false appearances of it, and the justice of Heaven be displayed in its final retributions; in order that the failings of men might be so discovered to themselves, as to afford them proper instruction, and promote their amendment; and in order that their characters might be shewn to the world in every point of view, which could furnish either examples for imitation, or admonitions of danger. The accomplishment of these important purposes required, that human life should not always proceed in one tenour; but that it should both be chequered with many revolutions, and diversified by a variety of employments and ranks; in passing through which, the touchstone might be applied to the characters of men, and their hidden virtues or vices explored. Hazael might have appeared in history with a degree of reputation to which he was not entitled, had he continued to act in a subordinate station. At bottom, he was false and unsound. When raised higher in life, the corruption of his heart discovered itself; and he is now held forth with deserved infamy, as a warning to succeeding ages.

In the second place, We learn, from what has been said, the importance of attending, with the utmost care, to the choice which we make of our employment and condition in life. It has been shewn, that our external situation frequently operates powerfully on our moral character; and by consequence that it is strictly connected, not only with our temporal welfare, but with our everlasting happiness or misery. He who might have passed unblamed, and upright, through certain walks of life, by unhappily choosing a road where he meets with temptations too strong for his virtue, precipitates himself into shame here, and into endless ruin hereafter. Yet how often is the determination of this most important article left to the chance of accidental connexions, or submitted to the option of youthful fancy and humour? When it is made the subject of serious deliberation, how seldom have they, on whom the decision of it depends, any further view than so to dispose of one who is coming out into life, as that he may the soonest become rich, or, as it is expressed, make his way to most advantage in the world? Are there no other objects than this to be attended to, in fixing the plan of life? Are there no more sacred and important interests which deserve to be consulted?—You would not willingly place one whose welfare you studied, in a situation for which you were convinced that his abilities were unequal. These, therefore, you examine with care; and on them you rest the ground of your decision. Be persuaded that not abilities merely, but the turn of the temper, and the heart, require to be examined with equal atten-

tion, in forming the plan of future establishment. Every one has some peculiar weakness, some predominant passion, which exposes him to temptations of one kind more than of another. Early this may be discerned to shoot; and from its first rising its future growth may be inferred. Anticipate its progress. Consider how it is likely to be affected by succeeding occurrences in life. If you bring one whom you are rearing up into a situation where all the surrounding circumstances shall cherish and mature this fatal principle in his nature, you become, in a great measure, answerable for the consequences that follow. In vain you trust to his abilities and powers. Vice and corruption, when they have tainted the heart, are sufficient to upset the greatest abilities. Nay, too frequently they turn them against the possessor; and render them the instruments of his more speedy ruin.

In the third place, We learn, from the history which has been illustrated, never to judge of true happiness, merely from the degree of men's advancement in the world. Always betrayed by appearances, the multitude are caught by nothing so much as by the show and pomp of life. They think every one blest, who is raised far above others in rank. From their earliest years they are taught to fix their views upon worldly elevation, as the ultimate object of their aims; and of all the sources of error in conduct, this is the most general. — Hazael, on the throne of Syria, would, doubtless, be more envied, and esteemed by the multitude a far happier man, than when, yet a subject, he was employed by Benhadad to carry his message to Elisha. Yet, O Hazael! how much better had it been for thee never to have known the name or honour of a king, than to have purchased it at the expence of so much guilt; forfeiting thy first and best character; rushing into crimes which were once thine abhorrence; and becoming a traitor to the native sentiments and dictates of thy heart! How fatal to thy repose proved that coveted purple, which was drenched by thee in so much innocent blood! How much more cheerful were thy days, and how much calmer thy nights, in the former periods of thy life, than when, placed on a throne, thy ears were invaded by day with the cries of the miserable whom thou hadst ruined; and thy slumbers broken by night with the shocking remembrance of thy cruelties and crimes! — Never let us judge by the outside of things; nor conclude a man to be happy, solely because he is encompassed with wealth or grandeur. Much misery often lurks where it is little suspected by the world. The material inquiries respecting felicity are, not what a man's external condition is, but with what disposition of mind he bears it; whether he be corrupted or improved by it; whether he conducts himself so as to be acceptable to God, and approved of by good men. For these are the circumstances which make the real and important distinctions among the conditions of men. The effects of these are to last for ever, when all worldly distinctions shall be forgotten.

In the fourth place, From all that has been said, we should learn never to be immoderately anxious about our external situation, but to submit our lot with cheerfulness to the disposal of Heaven. To make

the best and most prudent arrangements which we can, respecting our condition in life, is matter of high duty. But let us remember that all the plans which we form are precarious and uncertain. After the utmost precautions taken by human wisdom, no man can foresee the hidden dangers which may await him in that path of life on which he has pitched. Providence chooses for us much more wisely than we can choose for ourselves; and, from circumstances that appeared at first most unpromising and adverse, often brings forth in the issue both temporal and spiritual felicity. *Who knoweth what is good for a man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?* When we consider the darkness of our present state, the imbecility of human nature, and the doubtful and ambiguous value of all that we call prosperity, the exhortation of the Psalmist comes home with great force on every reflecting mind, *Commit thy way unto the Lord.** Form thy measures with prudence; but divest thyself of anxiety about the issue. Instead of seeking to order thine own lot, acquiesce in the appointment of Heaven, and follow without hesitation the call of Providence, and of duty. In whatever situation of life God shall place thee, look up devoutly to Him for grace and assistance; and study to act the part assigned thee with a faithful and upright heart. Thus shalt thou have peace within thyself, while thy course is going on; and when it draws towards a close, with satisfaction thou shalt review thy conduct. For, after all the toils and labours of life, and all the vain struggles which we maintain for pre-eminence and distinction, we shall find at the conclusion of the whole scene, that *to fear God and keep his commandments is the whole duty of man.*

SERMON XXVIII.

ON THE BENEFITS TO BE DERIVED FROM THE HOUSE OF MOURNING.

ECCLESIASTES, vii. 2, 3, 4.

It is better to go to the house of mourning, than to go to the house of feasting; for that is the end of all men, and the living will lay it to his heart. Sorrow is better than laughter; for by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

MANY of the maxims contained in this book of Ecclesiastes will appear strange sayings to the men of the world. But when they reflect on the character of him who delivers them, they cannot but admit that his tenets deserve a serious and attentive examination. For, they are not the doctrines of a pedant, who, from an obscure retirement, declaims against pleasures which he never knew. They are

* Psalm xxxvii. 5.

not the invectives of a disappointed man, who takes revenge upon the world, by satirising those enjoyments which he sought in vain to obtain. They are the conclusions of a great and prosperous prince, who had once given full scope to his desires; who was thoroughly acquainted with life in its most flattering scenes; and who now, reviewing all that he had enjoyed, delivers to us the result of long experience, and tried wisdom. None of his principles seem, at first view, more dubious and exceptionable than those which the Text presents. To assert that sorrow is preferable to mirth, and the *house of mourning* to the *house of feasting*; to advise men to choose mortification and sadness, when it is in their power to indulge in joy, may appear harsh and unreasonable doctrines. They may, perhaps, be accounted enemies to the innocent enjoyment of life, who give countenance to so severe a system, and thereby increase the gloom which already sits sufficiently heavy on the condition of man. But let this censure be suspended, until we examine with care into the spirit and meaning of the sentiments here delivered.

It is evident that the wise man does not prefer sorrow, upon its own account, to mirth; or represent sadness as a state more eligible than joy. He considers it in the light of discipline only. He views it with reference to an end. He compares it with certain improvements which he supposes it to produce; *when the heart is made better by the sadness of the countenance, and the living to lay to heart what is the end of all men.* Now, if great and lasting benefits are found to result from occasional sadness, these, sure, may be capable of giving it the preference to some fleeting sensations of joy. The means which he recommends in order to our obtaining those benefits, are to be explained according to the principles of sound reason; and to be understood with those limitations which the Eastern style, in delivering moral precepts, frequently requires. He bids us *go to the house of mourning*; but he does not command us to dwell there. When he prefers sorrow to laughter, he is not to be understood as prohibiting all mirth; as requiring us to wear a perpetual cloud on our brow, and to sequester ourselves from every cheerful entertainment of social life. Such an interpretation would be inconsistent with many other exhortations in his own writings, which recommend temperate and innocent joy. It would not suit with the proper discharge of the duties which belong to us as members of society; and would be most opposite to the goodness and benignity of our Creator. The true scope of his doctrine in this passage is, that there is a certain temper and state of heart, which is of far greater consequence to real happiness, than the habitual indulgence of giddy and thoughtless mirth; that for the attainment and cultivation of this temper, frequent returns of grave reflection are necessary; that, upon this account, it is profitable to give admission to those views of human distress which tend to awaken such reflection in the mind; and that thus, from the vicissitudes of sorrow, which we either experience in our own lot, or sympathise with in the lot of others, much wisdom and improvement may be derived. These are the sentiments which I purpose at present to justify and recommend, as most suitable to the character of men and

of Christians; and not in the least inconsistent with pleasure, rightly understood.

Among the variety of dispositions which are to be found in the world, some indeed require less of this discipline than others. There are persons whose tender and delicate sensibility, either derived from nature, or brought on by repeated afflictions, renders them too deeply susceptible of every mournful impression; whose spirits stand more in need of being supported and cheered, than of being saddened by the dark views of human life. In such cases we are commanded to *lift up the hands which hang down, and to confirm the feeble knees.** But this is far from being the common disposition of men. Their minds are in general inclined to levity, much more than to thoughtful melancholy; and their hearts more apt to be contracted and hardened, than to relent with too much facility. I shall therefore endeavour to shew them, what had inclinations their compliance with Solomon's advice would correct; what good dispositions, with respect to God, their neighbours, and themselves, it would improve; and how, upon the whole, his doctrine is verified, that *by the sadness of the countenance the heart is made better.*

I BEGIN by observing, that the temper recommended in the Text suits the present constitution of things in this world. Had man been destined for a course of undisturbed enjoyment, perpetual gaiety would then have corresponded to his state; and pensive thought have been an unnatural intrusion. But in a state where all is chequered and mixed, where there is no prosperity without a reverse, and no joy without its attending griefs, where from the house of feasting all must, at one time or other, pass into the house of mourning, it would be equally unnatural if no admission were given to grave reflection. The mind of man must be attempered to his condition. Providence, whose wisdom is conspicuous in all its works, has adjusted with exact proportion the inward powers of the outward state of every rational being. It has for this purpose implanted the serious and sympathetic feelings in our nature, that they might correspond with the vicissitudes of sorrow in our lot. He who endeavours to repel their influence, or to stifle them in unseasonable mirth, acts a violent and unnatural part. He strives with vain effort against the current of things, contradicts the intentions of his Maker, and counteracts the original impulses of his own heart.

It is proper also to observe, that as *the sadness of the countenance* has, in our present situation, a proper and natural place; so it is requisite to the true enjoyment of pleasure. Worldly and sensual men often remark, not till it be too late, that, by the studied efforts of constant repetition, all their pleasures fail. They draw them off so close to the dregs, that they become insipid and nauseous. Hence even in *laughter their heart is sorrowful, and the end of their mirth is heaviness.†* It is only the interposal of serious and thoughtful hours, that can give any lively sensations to the returns of joy. I speak not of those thoughtful hours, too well known to sinners, which proceed from guilty remorse; and which, instead of preparing for future

* Isaiah, xxxv. 3. — Heb. xii. 12.

† Prov. xiv. 13.

pleasure, damp and sicken the moment of enjoyment: but of those which take rise from the mind retreating into itself, and opening to the sentiments of religion and humanity. Such hours of virtuous sadness brighten the gleams of succeeding joy. They give, to the temperate enjoyments of the pious and humane, a refined and delicate relish, to which the hardened and insensible are entire strangers. For it will be found, that in proportion as the tender affections of the soul are kept awake, how much soever they may sometimes distress the heart, they preserve it open likewise to the most agreeable sensations. He who never knew the sorrows of friendship, never also knew its joys. He whose heart cannot relent in the house of mourning, will, in the most social hour of the house of feasting, partake of no more than the lowest part of animal pleasure. — Having premised these observations, I proceed to point out the direct effects of a proper attention to the distresses of life upon our moral and religious character.

In the first place, The house of mourning is calculated to give a proper check to our natural thoughtlessness and levity. The indolence of mankind, and their love of pleasure, spread through all characters and ranks some degree of aversion to what is grave and serious. They grasp at any object, either of business or amusement, which makes the present moment pass smoothly away; which carries their thoughts abroad, and saves them from the trouble of reflecting on themselves. With too many this passes into a habit of constant dissipation. If their fortune and rank allow them to indulge their inclinations, they devote themselves to the pursuit of amusement through all its different forms. The skilful arrangement of its successive scenes, and the preparatory study for shining in each, are the only exertions on which their understanding is employed. Such a mode of life may keep alive, for a while, a frivolous vivacity. It may improve men in some of those exterior accomplishments, which sparkle in the eyes of the giddy and the vain; but it must sink them in the esteem of all the wise. It renders them strangers to themselves; and useless, if not pernicious, to the world. They lose every main principle. Their minds become relaxed and effeminate. All that is great or respectable in the human character, is buried under a mass of trifles and follies.

If some measures ought to be taken for rescuing the mind from this disgraceful levity; if some principles must be acquired, which may give more dignity and steadiness to conduct; where, I pray you, are these to be looked for? Not surely in the house of feasting, where every object flatters the senses, and strengthens the seductions to which we are already prone; where the spirit of dissipation circulates from heart to heart; and the children of folly mutually admire and are admired. It is in the sober and serious house of mourning that the tide of vanity is made to turn, and a new direction given to the current of thought. When some affecting incident presents a strong discovery of the deceitfulness of all worldly joy, and rouses our sensibility to human woe; when we behold those with whom we had lately mingled in the house of feasting, sunk by some of the

sudden vicissitudes of life into the vale of misery; or when, in sad silence, we stand by the friend whom we had loved as our own soul, stretched on the bed of death; then is the season when the world begins to appear in a new light; when the heart opens to virtuous sentiments, and is led into that train of reflection which ought to direct life. He who before knew not what it was to commune with his heart on any serious subject, now puts the question to himself, For what purpose he was sent forth into this mortal, transitory state; what his fate is likely to be when it concludes; and what judgment he ought to form of those pleasures which amuse for a little, but which, he now sees, cannot save the heart from anguish in the evil day? Touched by the hand of thoughtful melancholy, that airy edifice of bliss, which fancy had raised up for him, vanishes away. He beholds, in the place of it, the lonely and barren desert, in which, surrounded with many a disagreeable object, he is left musing upon himself. The time which he has mis-spent, and the faculties which he has misemployed, his foolish levity, and his criminal pursuits, all rise in painful prospect before him. That unknown state of existence into which, race after race, the children of men pass, strikes his mind with solemn awe. — Is there no course by which he can retrieve his past errors? Is there no superiour power to which he can look up for aid? Is there no plan of conduct, which, if it exempt him not from sorrow, can at least procure him consolation amidst the distressful exigencies of life? — Such meditations as these, suggested by the house of mourning, frequently produce a change on the whole character. They revive those sparks of goodness which were nigh being quite extinguished in the dissipated mind; and give rise to principles and conduct more rational in themselves, and more suitable to the human state.

IN the second place, Impressions of this nature not only produce moral seriousness, but awaken sentiments of piety, and bring men into the sanctuary of religion. One might, indeed, imagine that the blessings of a prosperous condition would prove the most natural incitements to devotion; and that when men were happy in themselves, and saw nothing but happiness around them, they could not fail gratefully to acknowledge that God who *giveth them all things richly to enjoy*. Yet such is their corruption, that they are never more ready to forget their benefactor, than when loaded with his benefits. The giver is concealed from their careless and inattentive view, by the cloud of his own gifts. When their life continues to flow in one smooth current, unruffled by any griefs; when they neither receive in their own circumstances, nor allow themselves to receive from the circumstances of others, any admonitions of human instability; they not only become regardless of Providence, but are in hazard of contemning it. Glorifying in their strength, and lifted up by the pride of life into supposed independence, that impious sentiment, if not uttered by the mouth, yet too often lurks in the hearts of many, during their flourishing periods, *What is the Almighty, that we should serve him; and what profit should we have, if we pray unto him?*

If such be the tendency of the house of feasting, how necessary is

it, that, by some change in their situation, men should be obliged to enter into the house of mourning, in order to recover a proper sense of their dependent state? It is there, when forsaken by the gaieties of the world, and left alone with God, that we are made to perceive how awful his government is; how easily human greatness bends before him; and how quickly all our designs and measures, at his interposal, vanish into nothing. There, when the countenance is sad, and the affections are softened by grief; when we sit apart, involved in serious thought, looking down as from some eminence on those dark clouds that hang over the life of man, the arrogance of prosperity is humbled, and the heart melts under the impressions of religion. Formerly we were taught, but now we see, we feel, how much we stand in need of an Almighty Protector, amidst the changes of this vain world. Our soul cleaves to Him who *despises not, nor abhors the affliction of the afflicted*. Prayer flows forth of its own accord from the relenting heart, that he may be our God, and the God of our friends in distress; that he may never forsake us while we are sojourning in this land of pilgrimage; may strengthen us under its calamities; and bring us hereafter to those habitations of rest, where we, and they whom we love, may be delivered from the trials which all are now doomed to endure. The discoveries of his mercy, which he has made in the Gospel of Christ, are viewed with joy, as so many rays of light sent down from above to dispel, in some degree, the surrounding gloom. A Mediator and Intercessor with the Sovereign of the universe, appear comfortable names; and the resurrection of the just becomes the powerful cordial of grief. In such moments as these, which we may justly call happy moments, the soul participates of all the pleasures of devotion. It feels the power of religion to support and relieve. It is softened, without being broken. It is full, and it pours itself forth; pours itself forth, if we may be allowed to use the expression, into the bosom of its merciful Creator.

In the third place, Such serious sentiments produce the happiest effect upon our disposition towards our fellow-creatures, as well as towards God. It is a common and just observation, that they who have lived always in affluence and ease, strangers to the miseries of life, are liable to contract hardness of heart with respect to all the concerns of others. Wrapped up in themselves, and their own pleasures, they behold with indifference the most affecting scenes of distress. Habituated to indulge all their desires without controul, they become impatient of the least provocation or offence; and are ready to trample on their inferiours, as if they were creatures of a different species from themselves. Is this an amiable temper, or such as becomes a man? When appearing in others, do we not view it with much displeasure? When imputed to ourselves, can we avoid accounting it a severe reproach?

By the experience of distress, this arrogant insensibility of temper is most effectually corrected; as the remembrance of our own sufferings naturally prompts us to feel for others when they suffer. But if Providence has been so kind as not to subject us to much of this discipline in our own lot, let us draw improvement from the harder lot

of others. Let us sometimes step aside from the smooth and flowery paths in which we are permitted to walk, in order to view the toilsome march of our fellows through the thorny desert. By voluntarily going into the house of mourning; by yielding to the sentiments which it excites, and mingling our tears with those of the afflicted, we shall acquire that humane sensibility which is one of the highest ornaments of the nature of man. Perceiving how much the common distresses of life place us all on a level, and render the high and the low, the rich and the poor, companions in misfortune and mortality, we shall learn to set no man at nought, and, least of any, our afflicted brother. Prejudices will be extinguished, and benevolence opened and enlarged, when looking around on the multitude of men, we consider them as a band of fellow-travellers in the valley of woe, where it ought to be the office of every one to alleviate, as much as possible, the common burden. — While the vain and the licentious are revelling in the midst of extravagance and riot, how little do they think of those scenes of sore distress which are going on at that moment throughout the world; multitudes struggling for a poor subsistence to support the wife and the children whom they love, and who look up to them with eager eyes for that bread which they can hardly procure; multitudes groaning under sickness in desolate cottages, untended and unmourned; many, apparently in a better situation of life, pining away in secret with concealed griefs; families weeping over the beloved friends whom they have lost, or, in all the bitterness of anguish, bidding those who are just expiring the last adieu.

May we not appeal to the heart of every good man, nay almost to the heart of every man who has not divested himself of his natural feelings, whether the admission of such views of human life might not, sometimes at least, furnish a more worthy employment to the mind, than that *mirth of fools*, which Solomon compares to *the crackling of thorns under a pot* *; the transient burst of unmeaning joy; the empty explosion of giddiness and levity? Those sallies of jollity in the house of feasting are often forced from a troubled mind; like flashes from the black cloud, which, after a momentary effulgence, are succeeded by thicker darkness. Whereas compassionate affections, even at the time when they draw tears from our eyes for human misery, convey satisfaction to the heart. The gracious appointment of Heaven has ordained that sympathetic pains should always be accompanied with a certain degree of pleasure; on purpose that we might be more interested in the case of the distressed, and that, by this mysterious bond, man might be linked closer to man. The inward satisfaction which belongs to the compassionate affections is, at the same time, heightened by the approbation which they receive from our reason; and by the consciousness which they afford us of feeling what men and Christians ought to feel.

In the fourth place, The disposition recommended in the Text, not only improves us in piety and humanity, but likewise assists us in self-government, and the due moderation of our desires. The house of mourning is the school of temperance and sobriety. Every wise

* Eccles. vii. 6.

man will find it for his interest to enter into it sometimes of his own accord, lest otherwise he be compelled to take up his dwelling there. Seasonable interruptions of our pleasures are necessary to their prolongation. For, continued scenes of luxury and indulgence hasten to a melancholy issue. The house of feasting too often becomes an avenue to the house of mourning. Short, to the licentious, is the interval between them; and speedy the transition from the one to the other.

But supposing that, by prudent management, the men of pleasure could avoid the pernicious effects which intemperance and dissoluteness are likely to produce on their health or their fortune, can they also prevent those disorders which such habits will introduce into their minds? Can they escape that wrath of the Almighty, which will infallibly pursue them for their sins both here and hereafter? For whence, so much as from the unchecked pursuit of pleasure, do all those crimes arise which stain the characters of men with the deepest guilt, and expose them to the severest judgments of Heaven? Whence, then, is the corrective of those mischiefs to be sought, but from such discipline as shall moderate that intemperate admiration of the world which gave rise to the evil? By repairing sometimes to the house of mourning, you would chasten the looseness of fancy, abate the eagerness of passion, and afford scope to reason for exerting her restraining powers. You would behold this world stripped of its false colours, and reduced to its proper level. Many an important instruction you would receive from the humiliation of the proud, the mortification of the vain, and the sufferings of the voluptuous, which you would see exemplified before you, in the chambers of sorrow, of sickness, and of death. You would then be taught *to rejoice as though you rejoiced not, and to weep as though you weeped not*; that is, neither in joy, nor in grief, to run to excess; but *to use this world so as not to abuse it*; contemplating *the fashion thereof as passing away*.

Moreover, you would there learn the important lesson of suiting your mind, beforehand, to what you had reason to expect from the world; a lesson too seldom studied by mankind, and to the neglect of which, much of their misery, and much of their guilt, is to be charged. By turning away their eyes from the dark side of life, by looking at the world only in one light, and that a flattering one, they form their measures on a false plan, and are necessarily deceived and betrayed. Hence, the vexation of succeeding disappointment and blasted hope. Hence, their criminal impatience of life, and their bitter accusations of God and man; when, in truth, they have reason to accuse only their own folly.—Thou who wouldst act like a wise man, and build thy house on the rock, and not on the sand, contemplate human life not only in the sunshine, but in the shade. Frequent the house of mourning, as well as the house of mirth. Study the nature of that state in which thou art placed; and balance its joys with its sorrows. Thou seest that the cup which is held forth to the whole human race, is mixed. Of its bitter ingredients, expect that thou art to drink thy portion. Thou seest the storm hovering every where in the clouds around thee. Be not surprised if on thy

head it shall break. Lower, therefore, thy sails. Dismiss thy florid hopes; and come forth prepared either to act or to suffer, according as Heaven shall decree. Thus shalt thou be excited to take the properest measures for defence, by endeavouring to secure an interest in his favour, who, *in the time of trouble, can hide thee in his pavilion.* Thy mind shall adjust itself to follow the order of his Providence. Thou shalt be enabled, with equanimity and steadiness, to hold thy course through life.

IN the fifth place, By accustoming ourselves to such serious views of life, our excessive fondness for life itself will be moderated, and our minds gradually formed to wish and to long for a better world. If we know that our continuance here is to be short, and that we are intended by our Maker for a more lasting state, and for employments of a nature altogether different from those which now occupy the busy, or amuse the vain, we must surely be convinced that it is of the highest consequence to prepare ourselves for so important a change. This view of our duty is frequently held up to us in the sacred writings; and hence religion becomes, though not a morose, yet a grave and solemn principle, calling off the attention of men from light pursuits to those which are of eternal moment. *What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?* if he shall lead a life of thoughtless mirth on earth, and exclude himself from eternal felicity in heaven? Worldly affection and sensual pleasure depress all our higher powers. They form an unnatural union between the human soul and this earth, which was only designed for its temporary abode. They attach it too strongly to objects from which it must shortly part. They alienate its desires from God and Heaven, and deject it with slavish and unmanly fears of death. Whereas, by the discipline of religious seriousness, it is gradually loosened from the fetters of sense. Assisted to discover the vanity of this world, it rises above it; and, in the hours of sober thought, cultivates connexion with those divine and immortal objects, among which it is designed to dwell.

ENOUGH has now been said to convince any thinking person of the justice and reasonableness of the maxims in the Text; and to show, that, on various occasions, *sorrow may be better than laughter.* Wouldst thou acquire the habit of recollection, and fix the principles of thy conduct; wouldst thou be led up to thy Creator and Redeemer, and be formed to sentiments of piety and devotion; wouldst thou be acquainted with those mild and tender affections which delight the compassionate and humane; wouldst thou have the power of sensual appetites tamed and corrected, and thy soul raised above the ignoble love of life, and fear of death? Go, my brother, go—not to scenes of pleasure and riot, not to the house of feasting and mirth—but to the silent house of mourning; and adventure to dwell for a while among objects that will soften thy heart. Contemplate the lifeless remains of what once was fair and flourishing. Bring home to thyself the vicissitudes of life. Recal the remembrance of the friend, the parent, or the child, whom thou tenderly lovedst. Look back on the days of former years; and think on the companions of thy youth, who

now sleep in the dust. Let the vanity, the mutability, and the sorrows of the human estate, rise in full prospect before thee; and though *thy countenance may be made sad, thy heart shall be made better*. This sadness, though for the present it dejects, yet shall in the end fortify thy spirit; inspiring thee with such sentiments, and prompting such resolutions, as shall enable thee to enjoy, with more real advantage, the rest of life. Dispositions of this nature form one part of the character of those *mourners* whom our Saviour hath pronounced *blessed* *; and of those to whom it is promised, that *sowing in tears, they shall reap in joy*.† A great difference there is between being serious and melancholy; and a melancholy too there is of that kind which deserves to be sometimes indulged.

Religion hath, on the whole, provided for every good man abundant materials of consolation and relief. How dark soever the present face of nature may appear, it dispels the darkness, when it brings into view the entire system of things, and extends our survey to the whole kingdom of God. It represents what we now behold as only a part, and a small part, of the general order. It assures us, that though here, for wise ends, misery and sorrow are permitted to have place, these temporary evils shall, in the end, advance the happiness of all who love God, and are faithful to their duty. It shows them this mixed and confused scene vanishing by degrees away, and preparing the introduction of that state, where the house of mourning shall be shut up for ever; where no tears are seen, and no groans heard; where no hopes are frustrated, and no virtuous connexions dissolved; but where, under the light of the Divine countenance, goodness shall flourish in perpetual felicity. Thus, though religion may occasionally chasten our mirth with sadness of countenance, yet under that sadness it allows not the heart of good men to sink; it calls upon them to rejoice, *because the Lord reigneth, who is their Rock, and the most high God, who is their Redeemer*. Reason likewise joins her voice with that of Religion; forbidding us to make peevish and unreasonable complaints of human life, or injuriously to ascribe to it more evil than it contains. Mixed as the present state is, she pronounces, that generally, if not always, there is more happiness than misery, more pleasure than pain, in the condition of man.

SERMON XXIX.

ON THE DIVINE GOVERNMENT OF THE PASSIONS OF MEN.

PSALM lxxvi. 10.

By the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shall thou restrain.

This Psalm appears to have been composed on occasion of some remarkable deliverance obtained by the Jewish nation. It is generally

* Matt. v. 4.

† Psalm cxxvi. 5.

understood to have been written in the reign of Hezekiah, and to refer to the formidable invasion of Judea by Sennacherib; when the angel of the Lord, in one night, discomfited the whole Assyrian host, and smote them with sudden destruction. To this interposition of the Divine arm, those expressions in the context may naturally be applied; *There brake he the arrows of the bow, the shield, the sword, and the battle. The stout-hearted are spoiled; they have slept their sleep; and none of the men of might have found their hands. At thy rebuke, O God of Jacob! both the chariot and the horse are cast into a dead sleep.* In the Text we have the wise and religious reflection of the Psalmist upon the violent designs which had been carried on by the enemies of his country, and upon the issue to which Providence had brought them. *Surely the wrath of man shall praise thee. By the wrath of man, we are to understand all that the impetuosity of human passions can devise or execute; the projects of ambition and resentment, the rage of persecution, the fury of war; the disorders which violence produces in private life, and the public commotions which it excites in the world. All these shall praise God, not with their intention and design, nor by their native tendency; but by those wise and good purposes, which his providence makes them accomplish; from their poison extracting health, and converting things, which in themselves are pernicious, into instruments of his glory, and of public benefit: So that, though the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God, it is nevertheless forced and compelled to minister to his praise. The Psalmist adds, the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain; that is, God will allow scope to the wrath of man as far as it answers his good purposes, and is subservient to his praise; the rest of it shall be curbed and bound up. When it would attempt to go beyond its prescribed limit, he says to it, as to the waters of the ocean, Hitherto shalt thou come, but no farther; and here shall thy proud waves be stayed.*

All this shall be fully verified and declared by the last issue of things; when we shall be able more clearly to trace the Divine administration through its several steps, by seeing the consummation of the whole. In some cases, it may be reserved for this period to unfold the mysterious wisdom of Heaven. But in general, as much of the Divine conduct is at present manifest, as gives just ground for the assertion in the Text. In the sequel of this Discourse I shall endeavour to illustrate and confirm it. I shall show in what manner the wrath of man is made to praise the power, the wisdom, the justice, and the goodness of God.

I BEGIN with this observation, That in order to accomplish the great purposes carried on by the Governour of the Universe, it is necessary that the Divine perfections be displayed before mankind in a sensible and striking manner. We are not to conceive the Supreme Being as hereby seeking praise to himself, from a principle of ostentation or vain-glory. Independent and self-sufficient, he rests in the enjoyment of his own beatitude. His praise consists in the general order and welfare of his creation. This end cannot be attained, unless mankind be made to feel the subjection under which they are

placed. They must be taught to admire and adore their Sovereign. They must be overawed by the view of a high hand, which can at pleasure controul their actions, and render them subservient to purposes which they neither foresaw nor intended. Hence the propriety of God's making *the wrath of man to praise him*. We easily conceive in what manner the heavens and the earth are said to praise God, as they are standing monuments of that supreme perfection which is displayed in their creation. The virtues of good men obviously praise him, by exhibiting his image, and reflecting back his glory. But when even the vices and inordinate passions of bad men are made to praise him, in consequence of the useful purposes which they are compelled to accomplish, this, in a particular manner, distinguishes and signalizes a Divine hand; this opens a more wonderful prospect of the administration of Heaven, than if all its subjects had been loyal and willingly obedient, and the course of human affairs had proceeded in a quiet and regular tenour.

I. *The wrath of man* redounds to the praise of Divine power. It brings it forth, with full and awful lustre, to the view of mankind. To reign with sovereign command amidst the most turbulent and disordered state of things, both in the natural and moral world, is the peculiar glory of Omnipotence. Hence God is described in Scripture as *sitting on the flood, riding on the wings of the wind, dwelling in the darkness and the tempest*; that is, making the most violent powers in the universe minister to his will; giving them scope or restraining them, according as suits the purposes of his dominion. As *he stills, at his pleasure, the raging of the seas, and the noise of their waves*, in like manner *he stills the tumults of the people*. When the passions of men are most inflamed, and their designs just ripe for bursting into execution; often, by some unexpected interposition, he calls upon the world to observe that there is One higher than the highest on earth, who can frustrate their devices in a moment, and command *the earth to be still before him*. Proud fleets, destined to carry destruction to neighbouring kingdoms, may cover the ocean. He blows with his wind and they are scattered. Mighty armies may go forth to the field in all the glory of human strength; but the issues of battle are with Him. He suspends on high the invisible balance which weighs the fate of nations. According as the scale inclines, he gives to some slight event the power of deciding the contest. He clouds the sky with darkness, or opens the windows of heaven to let forth their flood. He dejects the hearts of the brave with sudden terrour, and renders the hands of the strong, weak and unperforming at the critical moment. A thousand unseen ministers stand ready to be the instruments of his power, in humbling the pride, and checking the efforts of the wrath of man. Thus, in the instance of haughty Sennacherib, and that boasted tempest of wrath which he threatened to pour upon all the Jewish nation; *I will put my hook, says the Almighty, in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.* In that night the destroying angel smote the host, and he departed with shame of face to his own land. *When the heathen*

*rage, and the people imagine a vain thing; when the kings of the earth set themselves, and its rulers take counsel together, He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision.**

II. THE *wrath of man* is made to praise the wisdom as well as the power of God. Nothing displays more remarkably the admirable counsel of Heaven, than its arranging the train of events in such a manner, that the unruly passions of the wicked shall contribute to overthrow their own designs. History abounds with examples of their being rendered the unconscious ministers of Providence, to accomplish purposes directly opposite to those which they had in view. Thus the cruelty of the sons of Jacob, in pursuing the destruction of their brother Joseph, became the means of effecting his high advancement. Thus the wrath of Pharaoh against the Israelites, and his unjust attempts to detain them in bondage, proved the occasion of bringing them forth from the land of slavery, with signal marks of the favour of Heaven. Thus the inhuman plan which Haman had formed for ruining Mordecai, and extirpating the whole Jewish nation, paved the way for Mordecai's high promotion, and for the triumph of the Jews over all their enemies.

After this manner the Almighty *snareth the wicked in the works of their hands*; and erects his own council upon the ruin of theirs. Those events which, viewed apart, appear as spots in the Divine administration, when considered in connexion with all their consequences, are often found to give it additional lustre. The beauty and magnificence of the universe are much heightened by its being an extensive and complicated system; in which a variety of springs are made to play, and a multitude of different movements are, with most admirable art, regulated and kept in order. Interfering interests, and jarring passions, are in such manner balanced against one another; such proper checks are placed on the violence of human pursuits; and the *wrath of man* is made so to hold his course, that how opposite soever the several motions seem to be, yet they concur and meet at last in one direction. While, among the multitudes that dwell on the face of the earth, some are submissive to the Divine authority; some rise up in rebellion against it; others, absorbed in their pleasures and pursuits, are totally inattentive to it; they are all so moved by an imperceptible influence from above, that the zeal of the dutiful, the wrath of the rebellious, and the indifference of the careless, contribute finally to the glory of God. All are governed in such a way as suits their powers, and is consistent with rational freedom; yet all are subjected to the necessity of fulfilling the eternal purposes of Heaven. This depth of Divine wisdom in the administration of the universe, exceeds all human comprehension, and affords everlasting subject of adoration and praise.

III. THE *wrath of man* praises the justice of God, by being employed as the instrument of inflicting punishment on sinners. If bad men trace the course of events in their life with attentive eyes, they might easily discover the greatest part of the disasters which they suffer, to be brought upon them by their own ungoverned

* Psalm ii. 1, 2, 4.

passions. The succession of causes and effects is so contrived by Providence, that the wrath which they meant to pour forth on others, frequently recoils, by its effects, upon themselves. But supposing them to escape those external mischiefs which violent passions naturally occasion, they cannot evade the internal misery which they produce. The constitution of things is framed with such profound wisdom, that the Divine laws, in every event, execute themselves against the sinner, and carry their sanction in their own bosom. The Supreme Being has no occasion to unlock the prisons of the deep, or to call down the thunder from Heaven, in order to punish the *wrath of man*. He carries on the administration of justice with more simplicity and dignity. It is sufficient that he allow those fierce passions which render bad men the disturbers of others, to operate on their own hearts. He delivers them up to themselves, and they become their own tormentors. Before the world, they may disguise their sufferings; but it is well known, that to be inwardly torn with despire, revenge, and wrathful passions, is the most intense of all misery. In thus connecting the punishment with the crime, making their *own wickedness to reprove them, and their backslidings to correct them*, the avenging hand of a righteous Governour is conspicuous; and thus the observation of the Psalmist is fully verified; *the wicked have drawn out the sword, and bent their bow, to cast down the poor and needy; but their sword shall enter into their own heart.**

The *wrath of man* also praises the justice of God in the punishment of other criminals, as well as of the wrathful themselves. Ambitious and lawless men are let loose upon each other, that, without any supernatural interposition, they may fulfil the just vengeance of Heaven in their mutual destruction. They may occasionally be cemented together by conspiracy against the just; but as no firm nor lasting bond can unite them, they become at last the prey of mutual jealousy, strife, and fraud. For a time, they may go on, and seem to prosper. The justice of Heaven may appear to slumber; but it is awake, and only waits till the measure of their iniquity be full. God represents himself in Scripture as sometimes permitting wickedness to arise to an overgrown height, on purpose that its ruin may be the greater, and more exemplary. He says to the tyrant of Egypt, that *for this cause he had raised him up*, that is, had allowed him to prosper and be exalted, *that he might shew in him his power; and that his name might be declared throughout all the earth.†* The Divine administration is glorified in the punishment contrived for the workers of iniquity, as well as in the reward prepared for the righteous. *This is the purpose which the Lord hath purposed upon all the earth; and this is the hand that is stretched forth over all the nations.‡*

IV. THE *wrath of man* is made to praise the goodness of God. This is the most unexpected of its effects; and therefore requires to be the most fully illustrated. All the operations of the government of the Deity may be ultimately resolved into goodness. His power, wisdom, and justice, all conduce to general happiness and order. Among the means which he uses for accomplishing this end, it will

* Psalm xxxvii. 14, 15.

† Exod. ix. 16.

‡ Isaiah, xiv. 26.

be found, that the wrath of man, through his over-ruling direction, possesses a considerable place.

FIRST, It is employed by God as an useful instrument of discipline and correction to the virtuous. The storms which ambition and pride raise among mankind, he permits with the same intention that he sends forth tempests among the elements; to clear the atmosphere of noxious vapours, and to purify it from that corruption which all things contract by too much rest. When wicked men prevail in their designs, and exercise the power which they have gained with a heavy and oppressive hand, the virtuous are apt to exclaim, in bitterness of soul, Where is the Lord? and where the sceptre of righteousness and truth? *Hath God forgotten to be gracious? or doth he indeed see, and is there knowledge in the Most High?* — Their oppressors are, in truth, no more than the ministers of God to them for good. He sees that they stand in need of correction, and therefore raises up enemies against them, in order to cure the intemperance of prosperity; and to produce, in the serious hours of affliction, proper reflections upon their duty, and their past errors.

In this light the disturbers of the earth are often represented in Scripture, as scourges in the hand of God, employed to inflict chastisement upon a degenerating people. They are commissioned for the execution of righteous and wise purposes, concealed from themselves; and when their commission is fulfilled, they are recalled and destroyed. Of this we have a remarkable example in the use which God made of the king of Assyria with respect to the people of Israel; *I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath, will I give him a charge, to take the spoil, and to take the prey. Howbeit, he meaneth not so; neither doth his heart think so; but it is in his heart to destroy, and cut off nations not a few. Wherefore it shall come to pass, that when the Lord hath performed his whole work upon Mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks.** In vain, then, doth the wrath of man lift itself up against God. *He saith, by the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent. Shall the axe boast itself against him that heweth therewith? or shall the saw magnify itself against him that shaketh it?* All things, whether they will it or not, must work together for good to them that love God. The wrath of man, among the rest, fills up the place assigned to it by the ordination of Heaven. The violent enemy, the proud conquerour, and the oppressive tyrant, possess only the same station with the famine, the pestilence, and the flood. Their triumphs are no more than the accomplishment of God's correction; and the remainder of their wrath shall he restrain.

SECONDLY, God makes the wrath of man contribute to the benefit of the virtuous, by rendering it the means of improving and signalizing their graces; and of raising them, thereby, to higher honour and glory. Had human affairs proceeded in an orderly train, and no opposition been made to religion and virtue by the violence of the wicked, what room would have been left for some of the highest and

* Isaiah, x. 6, 7. 12.

most generous exertions of the soul of man? How many shining examples of fortitude, constancy, and patience, would have been lost to the world? What a field of virtues peculiar to a state of discipline had lain uncultivated? Spirits of a higher order possess a state of established virtue, that stands in need of no such trials and improvements. But to us, who are only under education for such a state, it belongs to pass through the furnace, that our souls may be tried, refined, and brightened. We must stand the conflict, that we may be graced and crowned as conquerours. The *wrath of man* opens the field to glory; calls us forth to the most distinguished exercise of active virtue, and forms us to all those suffering graces which are among the highest ornaments of the human soul. It is thus, that the illustrious band of true patriots and heroes, of confessors and martyrs, have been set forth to the admiration of all ages, as *lights of the world*; while the rage and fury of enemies, instead of bearing them down, have only served to exalt and dignify them more.

THIRDLY, The *wrath of man* is often made to advance the temporal prosperity of the righteous. The occasional distresses which it brings upon them, frequently lay the foundation of their future success. The violence with which wicked men pursue their resentment, defeats its own purpose; and engages the world on the side of the virtuous, whom they persecute. The attempts of malice to blacken and defame them, bring forth their characters with more advantage to the view of impartial beholders. The extremities to which they are reduced by injustice and oppression, rouse their courage and activity; and often give occasion to such vigorous efforts in their just defence, as overcome all opposition, and terminate in prosperity and success. Even in cases where the *wrath of man* appears to prevail over the peaceable and the just, it is frequently, in its issue, converted into a blessing. How many have had reason to be thankful, for being disappointed by their enemies in designs which they earnestly pursued, but which, if successfully accomplished, they have afterwards seen would have occasioned their ruin? *Whoso is wise, and will observe these things, even he shall understand the loving-kindness of the Lord.**

While the *wrath of man* thus praises God by the advantages which it is made to bring to good men as individuals, the Divine hand is equally apparent in the similar effects which it is appointed to produce to nations and societies. When wars and commotions shake the earth, when factions rage, and intestine divisions embroil kingdoms that before were flourishing, Providence seems, at first view, to have abandoned public affairs to the misrule of human passions. Yet from the midst of this confusion, order is often made to spring; and from these mischiefs lasting advantages to arise. By such convulsions, nations are roused from that dangerous lethargy into which flowing wealth, long peace, and growing effeminacy of manners, had sunk them. They are awakened to discern their true interests; and taught to take proper measures for security and defence against all their foes. Inveterate prejudices are corrected; and latent sources of danger are discovered: Public spirit is called forth;

* Psalm cvii. 43.

and larger views of national happiness are formed. The corruptions to which every government is liable, are often rectified by a ferment in the political body, as noxious humours in the animal frame are carried off by the shock of a disease. Attempts made against a wise and well-established civil constitution tend in the issue to strengthen it; and the disorders of licentiousness and faction, teach men more highly to prize the blessings of tranquillity and legal protection.

FOURTHLY, The *wrath of man*, when it breaks forth in the persecution of religion, praises the Divine goodness, by being rendered conducive to the advancement of truth, and propagation of religion in the world. The church of God, since the days of its infancy, hath never been entirely exempted from the wrath of the world; and in those ages, during which it was most exposed to that wrath, it hath always flourished the most. In vain the policy and the rage of men united their efforts to extinguish this Divine light. Though all the four winds blew against it, it only shone brighter, and flamed higher. *Many waters could not quench it, nor all the floods drown it.* The constancy and fortitude of those who suffered for the truth, had a much greater effect in increasing the number of converts, than all the terror and cruelty of persecutors in diminishing it. By this means the *wrath of man* was made to turn against itself, to the destruction of its own purpose; like waves, which, assaulting a rock with impotent fury, discover its immoveable stability, while they dash themselves in pieces at its feet.

I SHALL only add one other instance of the *wrath of man* praising God, by accomplishing ends of most extensive benefit to mankind. Never did the rage and malice of the wicked imagine that they had obtained a more complete triumph, than in the death of Jesus Christ. When they had executed their purpose of making him suffer as a malefactor, they were confident that they had extinguished his name, and discomfited his followers for ever. Behold, how feeble are the efforts of the *wrath of man* against the decree of Heaven! All that they intended to overthrow, they most effectually established. The death of Christ was, in the councils of Heaven, the spring of everlasting life to the faithful. The cross on which he suffered with apparent ignominy, became the standard of eternal honour to him; the ensign under which his followers assembled, and triumphed. He who, at his pleasure, *restrains the remainder of wrath*, suffered the rage of our Saviour's enemies to suggest no other things to them than what, long before, he had determined, and his prophets had foretold. They all conspired to render the whole scene of Christ's sufferings exactly conformable to the original predicted plan of Divine mercy and goodness; and each of them contributed his share to accomplish that great undertaking, which none of them in the least understood, or meant to promote.—So remarkable an instance as this, fully ascertained in Scripture, of the *wrath of man* ministering to the designs of Heaven, ought to be frequently in our eye; as an exemplification of the conduct of Providence in many other cases, where we have not so much light afforded us for tracing its ways.

By this induction of particulars, the doctrine contained in the Text

is plainly and fully verified. We have seen, that the disorders which the pride and passions of men occasion in the world, though they take rise from the corruption of human nature in this fallen state, yet are so over-ruled by Providence, as to redound to his honour and glory who governs all. They illustrate before the world the Divine perfections in the administration of the universe. They serve the purposes of moral and religious improvement to the souls of men. By a secret tendency, they advance the welfare of those whom they appear to threaten with evil. *Surely, O God! the wrath of man shall praise thee; the remainder of wrath shalt thou restrain.*—In thy hand it is; and Thou never lettest it forth but in weight and in measure. It is wild and intractable in its nature; but Thou tamest it. It is blind and headlong in its impulse; but Thou directest it. It struggles continually to break its chain; but Thou confinest it; Thou retrenchest all the superfluity of its fury.—Let us now consider, what improvement is to be made of this meditation on the ways of Providence.

In the first place, Let it lead us to a religious contemplation of the hand of God in all the transactions of the world. In the ordinary course of human affairs, we behold a very mixed and busy scene; the passions of men variously agitated, and new changes daily taking place upon this stage of time. We behold peace and war alternately returning; the fortunes of private men rising and falling; and states and nations partaking of the same vicissitude. In all this, if we attend only to the operation of external causes, and to the mere rotation of events, we view no more than the inanimate part of nature; we stop at the surface of things; we contemplate the great spectacle which is presented to us, not with the eyes of rational and intelligent beings. The life and beauty of the universe arises from the view of that wisdom and goodness which animates and conducts the whole, and unites all the parts in one great design. There is an eternal Mind who puts all those wheels in motion; Himself remaining for ever at rest. Nothing is void of God. Even in the passions and ragings of men, He is to be found; and where they imagine they guide themselves, they are guided and controuled by his hand. What solemn thoughts and devout affections ought this meditation to inspire; when, in viewing the affairs of the world, we attend not merely to the actings of men, but to the ways of God; and consider ourselves, and all our concerns, as included in his high administration.

In the second place, The doctrine which has been illustrated should prevent us from censuring Providence, on account of any seeming disorders and evils which at present take place in the world. The various instances which have been pointed out in this Discourse, of human passion and wickedness rendered subservient to wise and useful ends, give us the highest reason to conclude, that in all other cases of seeming evil, the like ends are carried on. This ought to satisfy our mind, even when the prospect is most dark and discouraging. The plans of Divine wisdom are too large and comprehensive to be discerned by us in all their extent; and where we see only by parts, we must frequently be at a loss in judging of the whole.

The way of God is in the sea, and his paths in the great waters, his footsteps are not known. But although thou sayest thou canst not see him, yet judgment is before him, therefore trust thou in him.†* As in the natural world no real deformity is found, nothing but what has either some ornament or some use; so in the moral world, the most irregular and deformed appearances contribute, in one way or other, to the order of the whole. The Supreme Being, from the most opposite and disagreeing principles, forms universal concord; and adapts even the most harsh and dissonant notes to the harmony of his praise. As he hath reared the goodly frame of nature from various and jarring elements, and hath settled it in peace; so he hath formed such an union by his Providence of the more various interests, and more jarring passions of men, that they all conspire to his glory, and co-operate for general good. — How amazing is that wisdom, which comprehends such infinite diversities and contrarities within its scheme! How powerful that hand, which bends to its own purpose the good and the bad, the busy and the idle, the friends and the foes of truth; which obliges them all to hold on their course to his glory, though divided from one another by a multiplicity of pursuits, and differing often from themselves; and while they all move at their own freedom, yet, by a secret influence, winds and turns them at his will! *O the depth of the riches, both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!‡*

IN the third place, We see, from what has been said, how much reason there is for submission to the decrees of Heaven. Whatever distresses we suffer from the *wrath of man*, we have ground to believe that they befall not in vain. In the midst of human violence or oppression, we are not left to be the sport of fortune. Higher counsels are concerned. Wise and good designs are going on. God is always carrying forward his own purposes; and if these terminate in his glory, which is ever the same with the felicity of the righteous, is not this a sufficient reason for our calm and cheerful acquiescence?

Hence also, to conclude, arises the most powerful argument for studying, with zealous assiduity, to gain the favour and protection of the Almighty. If his displeasure hang over our heads, all things around us may be just objects of terror. For, against him, there is no defence. The most violent powers in nature are ministers to him. Formidable, indeed, may prove the *wrath of man*, if he be pleased to let it forth against us. To him, but not to us, it belongs to restrain it at pleasure. Whereas, when we are placed under his protection, all human wrath is divested of its terrors. *If he be for us, who, or what, can be against us?* Let us pursue the measures which he hath appointed for obtaining his grace, by faith, repentance, and a holy life, and we shall have no reason to be *afraid of evil tidings; our hearts will be fixed, trusting in the Lord.* When the religious fear of God possesses the heart, it expels the ignoble fear of man, and becomes the principle of courage and magnanimity. The Lord is a *buckler and a shield* to them that serve him. *When he ariseth, his enemies shall*

* Psalm lxxvii. 19.

† Job, xxxv. 14.

‡ Rom. xi. 33.

be scattered as smoke is driven away, and as chaff before the wind. He giveth strength and victory to his people; he clotheth them with salvation. The wrath of man shall praise him, and the remainder of wrath shall he restrain.

SERMON XXX.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF RELIGIOUS KNOWLEDGE TO MANKIND.

[Preached before the Society in Scotland for Propagating Christian Knowledge.]

ISAIAH, xi. 9.

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.

THIS passage of Scripture is understood, by all Christian interpreters, to refer to the days of the Gospel. The Prophet describes, in the context, the auspicious influence of the Messiah's reign, as extending over all nature, and producing universal felicity. The full accomplishment of this prediction is yet future, and respects some more advanced period of the kingdom of God, when true religion shall universally prevail, and the native tendency of the Gospel attain its entire effect. In the prospect of this event the Prophet seems to rise above himself, and celebrates that happy age in the most sublime strain of Eastern poetry. He opens a beautiful view of the state of the world, as a state of returning innocence. He represents all nature flourishing in peace; discord and guile abolished; the most hostile natures reconciled, and the most savage reformed and tamed. *The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard lie down with the kid; and the calf, and the young lion, and the fawning together, and a little child shall lead them. The lion shall eat straw like the ox; and the sucking child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.*

Upon reading these words, we must immediately perceive the great encouragement which they give to all good designs for promoting religion in the world. When we engage in these, we have the comfort of being engaged, not only in a good cause, but also in one that shall undoubtedly be successful. For we are here assured by the Divine promise, that truth and righteousness shall at length prevail, and that the increasing influence of religion shall introduce general happiness. It is a pleasing and animating reflection, that, in carrying on such designs, we act upon the Divine plan; and co-operate with God for advancing the kingdom of the Messiah. We have no reason to be discouraged by any unfavourable circumstances which at present oppose our pious endeavours. Though the ignorance, superstition, and corruption, which now fill so great a part of the world, have a

dark and mysterious aspect, it is not beyond the power of that Supreme Being, who brings light out of darkness, to clear up those perplexing appearances, and gradually to extricate mankind from the labyrinth of ignorance and error. Let us consider how improbable it seemed, when the Gospel was first published, that it should extend so far, and overthrow so much established superstition, as it has already done. There is nothing in the present state of the world, to render it more unlikely that it shall one day be universally received, and prevail in its full influence. At the rise of Christianity, the disproportion was, at least, as great between the apparent human causes, and the effect which has actually been produced, as there is in our age, between the circumstances of religion in the world, and the effect which we farther expect. *The Sun of righteousness* having already exerted its influence in breaking through the thickest darkness, we may justly hope, that it is powerful enough to dispel all remaining obscurity; and that it will ascend by degrees to that perfect day, when *healing shall be under its wings* to all the nations. *A little one shall become a thousand; and a small one a strong nation. I the Lord will hasten it in his time.**

BESIDES the prediction which the Text contains of the future success of religion, it points out also a precise connection between the increase of religious knowledge, and the happiness of mankind. *The knowledge of the Lord filling the earth*, is assigned as the cause why *they shall not hurt nor destroy in all the holy mountain of God*. To this I am now to lead your thoughts; as a subject both suited to the occasion of the present meeting, and proper to be illustrated in times, wherein total indifference to religious principles appears to gain ground. Whether Christianity shall be propagated farther or not, is treated as a matter of no great concern to mankind. The opinion prevails among many, that moral virtue may subsist, with equal advantage, independent of religion. For moral principles great regard is professed; but articles of religious belief are held to be abstract tenets, remote from life; points of mere speculation and debate, the influence of which is very inconsiderable on the actions of men. The general conduct, it is contended, will always proceed upon views and principles which have more relation to the present state of things; and religious knowledge can therefore stand in no necessary connection with their happiness and prosperity.—How adverse such opinions are, both to the profession and practice of religion, is abundantly evident. How adverse they are to the general welfare and real interests of mankind, I hope to make appear to candid minds.

By the *knowledge of the Lord*, in the Text, is not to be understood the natural knowledge of God only. It is plain that the prophet speaks of the age of the Messiah, when more enlarged discoveries should be made to mankind of the Divine perfections and government, than unassisted reason could attain. *The knowledge of the Lord*, therefore, comprehends the principles of Christianity, as well as of natural religion. In order to discern the importance of such knowledge to

* Isaiah, lx. 22

general happiness, we shall consider man, I. as an individual; II. as a member of society.

I. CONSIDERING man as an individual, let us inquire how far the knowledge of true religion is important, first, to his improvement; next, to his consolation.

FIRST, With respect to the improvement of man; the advancement of his nature in what is valuable and useful, the acquisition of such dispositions and habits as fit him for acting his part with propriety on this stage, and prepare him for a higher state of action hereafter; what benefit does he receive, in these respects, from religious knowledge and belief? It is obvious, that all increase of knowledge is improvement to the understanding. The more that its sphere is enlarged, the greater number of objects that are submitted to its view, especially when these objects are of intrinsic excellence, the more, must those rational powers, which are the glory of man, be in the course of attaining their proper strength and maturity. But were the knowledge of religion merely speculative, though the speculation must be admitted to be noble, yet less could be said of its importance. We recommend it to mankind, as forming the heart, and directing the life. Those pure and exalted conceptions which the Christian religion has taught us to entertain of the Deity, as the universal Father and righteous Governour of the universe, the Standard of unspotted perfection; *and the Author of every good and perfect gift*; conducting his whole administration with an eternal regard to order, virtue, and truth; ever favouring the cause, and supporting the interests, of righteous men; and applying, in this direction, the whole might of omnipotence, and the whole council of unerring wisdom, from the beginning to the end of things; such conceptions both kindle devotion, and strengthen virtue. They give fortitude to the mind in the practice of righteousness, and establish the persuasion of its being our highest interest.

All the doctrines peculiar to the Gospel are great improvements on what the light of nature had imperfectly suggested. A high dispensation of Providence is made known, particularly suited to the exigencies of man; calculated for recovering him from that corrupted state into which experience bears witness that he is fallen, and for restoring him to integrity, and favour with his Creator. The method of carrying on this great plan is such as gives us the most striking views of the importance of righteousness or virtue, and of the high account in which it stands with God. The Son of God appeared on the earth, and suffered as a propitiation for the sins of the world, with this express intention, that he might *bring in everlasting righteousness*; that he might *purge our consciences from dead works to serve the living God*; that he might *redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people zealous of good works*. Such a merciful interposition of the Creator of the world, while it illustriously displays his goodness, and signalizes his concern for the moral interests of mankind, affords us, at the same time, the most satisfying ground of confidence and trust. It offers an object to the mind on which it can lay hold for the security of its future hopes; when, with a certainty far beyond

what any abstract argument could yield, it appeals to a distinguished fact; and is enabled to say, *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* *

While the Divine government is thus placed in a light the most amiable, and most encouraging to every virtuous mind, there is, at the same time, something extremely awful and solemn in the whole doctrine of redemption. It is calculated to strike the mind with reverence for the Divine administration. It points at some deep malignity in sin, at some dreadful consequences flowing from guilt, unknown in their causes and in their whole effects to us, which moved the Sovereign of the world to depart from the ordinary course of Providence, and to bring about the restoration of his fallen creatures by a method so astonishing. Mankind are hereby awakened to the most serious reflections. Such views are opened of the sanctity of the Divine laws, of the strictness of the Divine justice, of the importance of the part which is assigned them to act, as serve to prevent their trifling with human life, and add dignity and solemnity to virtue. These great purposes are farther carried on, by the discovery which is made of the fixed connection in which this life stands with a future eternal state.

We are represented as *sowing now, what we are to reap* hereafter; undergoing a course of probation and trial, which, according as it terminates in our improvement, or leaves us unreformed and corrupted, will dismiss us to lasting abodes, either of punishment or reward. Such a discovery rises far above the dubious conjectures, and uncertain reasonings, which mere natural light suggests concerning the future condition of mankind. Here we find, what alone can produce any considerable influence on practice, explicit promise and threatening; an authoritative sanction given to a law; the Governour and Judge revealed; and all the motives which can operate on hope and fear, brought home to the heart, with, *Thus saith the Lord of Hosts*. In a word, a great and magnificent plan of Divine administration is opened to us in the Gospel of Christ; and nothing is omitted that can impress mankind with the persuasion of their being all, in the strictest sense, subjects of the moral government of God.

THOUGH the bounds of this Discourse allow us to take only an imperfect view of the principles of Christian doctrine, yet the hints which have been given, lay a sufficient foundation for appealing to every impartial mind, whether the knowledge and belief of such principles be not intimately connected with the improvement, and, by consequence, with the happiness of man? I reason now with such as admit, that virtue is the great source both of improvement and happiness. Let them lay what stress they please upon the authority of conscience, and upon the force and evidence of its dictates; can they refuse to allow that the natural tendency of the principles which I have mentioned, is to support those dictates, and to confirm that authority; to excite, on various occasions, the most useful sentiments; to provide additional restraints from vice, and additional motives to every virtue? Who dares pronounce, that there is no case in which

* Rom. viii. 32.

conscience stands in need of such assistance to direct, where there is so much uncertainty and darkness; and to prompt, where there is so much feebleness and irresolution, and such a fatal proneness to vice and folly?

But how good soever the tendency of religious principles may be, some will still call in question their actual significancy, and influence on life. This tendency is by various causes defeated. Between the belief of religious principles and a correspondent practice, it will be alleged that frequent experience shows there is no necessary connection; and that therefore the propagation of the one, cannot give us any assurance of proportionable improvements following in the other. — This, in part, is granted to be true; as we admit that religious knowledge and belief are susceptible of various degrees, before they arrive at that real Christian faith which the Scripture represents as *purifying the heart*. But though the connection between principle and practice be not necessary and invariable, it will not, I suppose, be denied, that there is some connection. Here then one avenue to the heart is opened. If the tendency of Religious Knowledge be good, wisdom must direct, and duty oblige us to cultivate it. For tendency will, at least in some cases, rise into effect; and, probably, in more cases than are known and observed by the world. Besides the distinguished examples of true religion and virtue, which have, more or less, adorned every age of the Christian æra, what numbers may there be, in the more silent and private scenes of life, overlooked by superficial observers of mankind, on whose hearts and lives religious principles have the most happy influence? Even on loose and giddy minds, where they are far from accomplishing their full effect, their influence is, frequently, not altogether lost. Impressions of religion often check vice in its career. They prevent it from proceeding its utmost length; and though they do not entirely reform the offender, they serve to maintain order in society. Persons who are now bad, might probably have been worse without them, and the world have suffered more from unrestrained licentiousness. They often sow latent seeds of goodness in the heart, which proper circumstances and occasions afterwards ripen; though the reformation of the offender may not be so conspicuous as his former enormities have been. From the native tendency of religious belief, there is reason to conclude, that those good effects of it are not so rare as some would represent them. By its nature and tendency, we can better judge of its effects, than by observations drawn from a supposed experience, which often is narrow in its compass, and fallacious in its conclusions.

* The actual influence of principle and belief of mankind admits of clear illustration from uncontested matter of fact. They who hold the good effects of Christian principles to be so inconsiderable, as to render the propagation of them of small importance, will be at no loss to give us instances of corrupt principles of belief having had the most powerful influence on the world. Loud complaints we hear from this quarter of the direful effects which superstition and enthusiasm have produced, of their having poisoned the tempers, and

transformed the manners, of men; of their having overcome the strongest restraints of law, of reason, and humanity. Is this then the case, that all principles, except good ones, are of such mighty energy? Strange! that false religion should be able to do so much, and true religion so little; that belief, so powerful in the one case, should be so impotent in the other. — No impartial inquirer, surely, can entertain this opinion. The whole history of mankind shows that their religious tenets and principles, of whatever nature they be, are of great influence in forming their character, and directing their conduct. The mischief which false principles have done, affords a good argument to guard carefully against error; but as it is a proof of what belief can do, it gives ground to hope the more from it, when rightly directed. The same torrent which, when it is put out of its natural course, overflows and lays waste a country, adorns and enriches it, when running in its proper channel. If it be alleged that superstition is likely to be more powerful in its effects than truth, because it agrees better with the follies and corruptions of the world, we may oppose to this, on the other hand, that truth has the Divine blessing and the countenance of Heaven on its side. Let us always hope well of a cause that is good in itself, and beneficial to mankind. Truth is mighty, and will prevail. Let us spread the *incorruptible seed* as widely as we can, and trust in God that he will give the increase. — Having thus shown the importance of Religious Knowledge to mankind in the way of improvement, let us,

In the second place, Consider it in the light of consolation; as bringing aid and relief to us amidst the distresses of life. Here religion incontestably triumphs; and its happy effects, in this respect, furnish a strong argument to every benevolent mind for wishing them to be farther diffused throughout the world. For without the belief and hope afforded by Divine Revelation, the circumstances of man are extremely forlorn. He finds himself placed here as a stranger in a vast universe, where the powers and operations of Nature are very imperfectly known; where both the beginnings and the issues of things are involved in mysterious darkness; where he is unable to discover, with any certainty, whence he sprung, or for what purpose he was brought into this state of existence; whether he be subjected to the government of a mild, or of a wrathful ruler; what construction he is to put on many of the dispensations of his providence; and what his fate is to be when he departs hence. What a disconsolate situation to a serious inquiring mind! The greater degree of virtue it possesses, its sensibility is likely to be the more oppressed by this burden of labouring thought. Even though it were in one's power to banish all uneasy thought, and to fill up the hours of life with perpetual amusement, life so filled up would, upon reflection, appear poor and trivial. But these are far from being the terms upon which man is brought into this world. He is conscious that his being is frail and feeble; he sees himself beset with various dangers; and is exposed to many a melancholy apprehension, from the evils which he may have to encounter, before he arrives at the close of life. In this distressed condition, to reveal to him such discoveries

of the Supreme Being, as the Christian religion affords, is to reveal to him a Father and a Friend; is to let in a ray of the most cheering light upon the darkness of the human estate. He who was before a destitute orphan, wandering in the inhospitable desert, has now gained a shelter from the bitter and inclement blast. He now knows to whom to pray, and in whom to trust; where to unbosom his sorrows, and from what hand to look for relief.

It is certain that when the heart bleeds from some wound of recent misfortune, nothing is of equal efficacy with religious comfort. It is of power to enlighten the darkest hour, and to assuage the severest woe, by the belief of Divine favour, and the prospect of a blessed immortality. In such hopes the mind expatiates with joy; and when bereaved of its earthly friends, solaces itself with the thoughts of one Friend, who will never forsake it. Refined reasonings concerning the nature of the human condition, and the improvement which philosophy teaches us to make of every event, may entertain the mind when it is at ease; may perhaps contribute to sooth it when slightly touched with sorrow. But when it is torn with any sore distress, they are cold and feeble, compared with a direct promise from the word of God. This is *an anchor to the soul both sure and stedfast*. This has given consolation and refuge to many a virtuous heart, at a time when the most cogent reasonings would have proved utterly unavailing.

Upon the approach of death, especially when, if a man thinks at all, his anxiety about his future interests must naturally increase, the power of religious consolation is sensibly felt. Then appears, in the most striking light, the high value of the discoveries made by the Gospel; not only life and immortality revealed, but a Mediator with God discovered; mercy proclaimed, through him, to the frailties of the penitent and the humble; and his presence promised to be with them when they are passing through *the valley of the shadow of death*, in order to bring them safe into unseen habitations of rest and joy. Here is ground for their leaving the world with comfort and peace. But in this severe and trying period, this labouring hour of nature, how shall the unhappy man support himself, who knows not, or believes not, the discoveries of religion? Secretly conscious to himself that he has not acted his part as he ought to have done, the sins of his past life arise before him in sad remembrance. He wishes to exist after death, and yet dreads that existence. The Governour of the world is unknown. He cannot tell whether every endeavour to obtain his mercy may not be vain. All is awful obscurity around him; and in the midst of endless doubts and perplexities, the trembling, reluctant soul is forced away from the body. As the misfortunes of life must, to such a man, have been most oppressive, so its end is bitter. His sun sets in a dark cloud; and the night of death closes over his head, full of misery.—Having now shown how important *the Knowledge of the Lord* is, both to the improvement and the consolation of man, considered as an individual, I am next to show,

II. How important this Knowledge is to him as a member of society. This branch of the subject is in part anticipated by what

has been said. For all the improvement which man receives, as an individual, redounds to the benefit of the public. Society reaps the fruit of the virtues of all the members who compose it; and in proportion as each, apart, is made better, the whole must flourish.

But, besides this effect, Religious Knowledge has a direct tendency to improve the social intercourse of men, and to assist them in co-operating for common good. It is the great instrument of civilizing the multitude, and forming them to union. It tames the fierceness of their passions, and softens the rudeness of their manners. There is much reason to doubt whether any regular society ever subsisted, or could subsist, in the world, destitute of all religious ideas and principles. They who, in early times, attempted to bring the wandering and scattered tribes of men from the woods, and to unite them in cities and communities, always found it necessary to begin with some institution of religion. The wisest legislators of old, through the whole progress of their systems of government, considered religion as essential to civil polity. If even those imperfect forms of it, loaded with so much superstition and error, were important to the welfare of society, how much more that reasonable worship of the true God, which is taught by the Gospel? True religion introduces the idea of regular subjection, by accustoming mankind to the awe of superiour power in the Deity, joined with the veneration of superiour wisdom and goodness. It is by its nature an associating principle; and creates new and sacred bonds of union among men. Common assemblies for religious worship, and joint homage offered up to one God; the sense of being all dependent on the same protection, and bound to duty by the same ties, sharers in the same benefits of Heaven, and expectants of the same reward, tend to awaken the sentiments of friendly relation, and to confirm and strengthen our mutual connexion. The doctrine of Christianity is most adverse to all tyranny and oppression, but highly favourable to the interests of good government among men. It represses the spirit of licentiousness and sedition. It inculcates the duty of subordination to lawful superiours. It requires us *to fear God, to honour the king, and not to meddle with them that are given to change.*

Religious Knowledge forwards all useful and ornamental improvements in society. Experience shows, that in proportion as it diffuses its light, learning flourishes, and liberal arts are cultivated and advanced. Just conceptions of religion promote a free and manly spirit. They lead men to think for themselves; to form their principles upon fair inquiry, and not to resign their conscience to the dictates of men. Hence they naturally inspire aversion to slavery of every kind; and promote a taste for liberty and laws. Despotic governments have generally taken the firmest root among nations that were blinded by Mahometan or Pagan darkness; where the throne of violence has been supported by ignorance and false religion. In the Christian world, during those centuries in which gross superstition held its reign undisturbed, oppression and slavery were in its train. The cloud of ignorance sat thick and deep over the nations; and the world was threatened with a relapse into ancient barbarity.

As soon as the true *Knowledge of the Lord* revived, at the auspicious æra of the Reformation, learning, liberty, and arts, began to shine forth with it, and to resume their lustre.

But the happy influence which religion exerts on society, extends much farther than to effects of this kind. It is not only subsidiary to the improvement, but necessary to the preservation of society. It is the very basis on which it rests. Religious principle is what gives men the surest hold of one another. That last and greatest pledge of veracity, an oath, without which no society could subsist, derives its whole authority from an established reverence of God, to whom it is a solemn appeal. Banish religious principle, and you loosen all the bonds which connect mankind together; you shake the fundamental pillar of mutual confidence and trust; you render the security arising from laws, in a great measure, void and ineffectual. For human laws and human sanctions cannot extend to numberless cases, in which the safety of mankind is deeply concerned. They would prove very feeble instruments of order and peace, if there were no checks upon the conduct of men from the sense of Divine legislation; if no belief of future rewards and punishments were to overawe conscience, and to supply the defects of human government.

Indeed, the belief of religion is of such importance to public welfare, that the most expressive description we could give of a society of men in the utmost disorder, would be to say that there was no fear of God left among them. Imagination would immediately conceive them as abandoned to rapine and violence, to perfidy and treachery; as deceiving and deceived, oppressing and oppressed; consumed by intestine broils, and ripe for becoming a prey to the first invader. On the other hand, in order to form the idea of a society flourishing in its highest glory, we need only conceive the belief of Christian principle exerting its full influence on the hearts and lives of all the members. Instantly, the most amiable scene would open to our view. We should see the causes of public disunion removed, when men were animated with that noble spirit of love and charity which our religion breathes; and formed to the pursuit of those higher interests, which give no occasion to competition and jealousy. We should see families, neighbourhoods, and communities, living in unbroken amity, and pursuing, with one heart and mind, the common interest; sobriety of manners, and simplicity of life, restored; virtuous industry carrying on its useful labours, and cheerful contentment every where reigning. Politicians may lay down what plans they please for advancing public prosperity; but, in truth, it is the prevalency of such principles of religion and virtue which forms the strength and glory of a nation. When these are totally wanting, no measures contrived by human wisdom can supply the defect. In proportion as they prevail, they raise the state of society from that sad degeneracy into which it is at present sunk, and carry it forward, under the blessing of Heaven, towards that happy period, when *nation shall not lift up their sword against nation, nor learn war any more.*

In order to prove the importance of Religious Knowledge to the interest of society, one consideration more, deserving particular atten-

tion, remains to be mentioned. It is, that if *good sense* be not sown in the field, *tares* will infallibly spring up. The propension towards religion is strong in the human heart. There is a natural preparation in our minds for receiving some impressions of supernatural belief. Upon these, among ignorant and uncultivated men, superstition or enthusiasm never fail to graft themselves. Into what monstrous forms these have shot forth, and what various mischiefs they have produced to society, is too well known. Nor is this the whole of the danger, Designing men are always ready to take advantage of this popular weakness, and to direct the superstitious bias of the multitude to their own ambitious and interested ends. Superstition, in itself a formidable evil, threatens consequences still more formidable, when it is rendered the tool of design and craft. Hence arises one of the most powerful arguments for Propagating with zeal, as far as our influence can extend, the pure and undefiled doctrines of the Gospel of Christ; in order that just and rational principles of religion may fill up that room in the minds of men, which dangerous fanaticism will otherwise usurp.

This consideration alone is sufficient to show the high utility of the design undertaken by the Society for Propagating Christian Knowledge. With great propriety, they have bestowed their chief attention on a remote quarter of our country, where, from a variety of causes, ignorance and superstition had gained more ground, than in any other corner of the land; where the inhabitants, by their local situation, were more imperfectly supplied with the means of proper education and instruction; and at the same time exposed to the seductions of such as sought to pervert them from the truth. The laudable endeavours of this Society, in diffusing religious and useful knowledge through this part of the country, have already been crowned with much success; and more is still to be expected from the continuance of their pious and well-directed attention.

With such good designs, it becomes all to co-operate, who are lovers of mankind. Thus shall they show their just sense of the value of that blessing which they enjoy, in the knowledge of the Gospel of Christ; and their gratitude to Heaven for conferring it upon them. Thus shall they make the blessings of those who are now ready to *perish through lack of knowledge*, descend upon their heads. Thus shall they contribute their endeavours for bringing forward that happy period, foretold by ancient prophecy; when *there shall be one Lord over all the earth, and his name one*; when *that name shall be great from the rising to the setting sun*; when *there shall be nothing to hurt nor destroy in all the holy mountain of God*; but *judgment shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness remain in the fruitful field*; *the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose*; and *the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea*.*

* Zech. xiv. 9. Malachi, i. 11. Isaiah, xi. 9. — xxxii. 16. — xxxv. 1.

SERMON XXXI.

ON THE TRUE HONOUR OF MAN.

PROVERBS, iv. 8.

Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour.

THE love of honour is one of the strongest passions in the human heart. It shows itself in our earliest years; and is coëval with the first exertions of reason. It accompanies us through all the stages of subsequent life; and in private stations discovers itself no less than in the higher ranks of society. In their ideas of what constitutes honour, men greatly vary, and often grossly err. But of somewhat which they conceive to form pre-eminence and distinction,* all are desirous. All wish, by some means or other, to acquire respect from those among whom they live; and to contempt and disgrace, none are insensible.

Among the advantages which attend religion and virtue, the honour which they confer on man is frequently mentioned in Scripture as one of the most considerable. *Wisdom is the principal thing, says Solomon, in the passage where the Text lies, therefore get wisdom; and with all thy getting, get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee; she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace; a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.* It is evident that throughout all the sacred writings, and particularly in the book of Proverbs, by *wisdom* is to be understood a principle of religion producing virtuous conduct. *The fear of the Lord* is said to be *the beginning of wisdom*: And by this fear of the Lord men are said to *depart from evil; to walk in the way of good men, and to keep the path of the righteous*.* Man is then regulated by *the wisdom which is from above*, when he is formed by piety to the duties of virtue and morality; and of the wisdom which produces this effect, it is asserted in the Text, that it *bringeth us to honour*.

On this recommendation of religion it is the more necessary to fix our attention, because it is often refused to it by men of the world. Their notions of honour are apt to run in a very different channel. Wherever religion is mentioned, they connect with it ideas of melancholy and dejection, or of mean and feeble spirits. They perhaps admit that it may be useful to the multitude, as a principle of restraint from disorders and crimes; and that to persons of a peculiar turn of mind, it may afford consolation under the distresses of life; but from the active scenes of the world, and from those vigorous exertions which display to advantage the human abilities, they incline totally to exclude it. It may sooth the timid or the sad: But they consider it as having no connexion with what is proper to raise men to honour and distinction. I shall now endeavour to remove this reproach

* Prov. ii. 20.

from religion; and to show that in every situation of human life, even in the highest stations, it forms the honour, as well as the happiness of man.

But first, let us be careful to ascertain what true religion I admit that there is a certain species of religion, (if we can give it that name,) which has no claim to such high distinction; when it is placed wholly in speculation and belief, in the regularity of external homage, or in fiery zeal about contested opinions. From a superstition inherent in the human mind, the religion of the multitude has always been tinctured with too much of this spirit. They serve God as they would serve a proud master, who may be flattered by their prostrations, appeased by their gifts, and gained by loud protestations of attachment to his interests, and of enmity to all whom they suppose to be his foes. But this is not that *wisdom* to which Solomon ascribes, in the Text, such high prerogatives. It is not the religion which we preach, nor the religion of Christ. That religion consists in the love of God and the love of man, grounded on faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, the great Redeemer of the world, the Intercessor for the penitent, and the Patron of the virtuous; through whom we enjoy comfortable access to the Sovereign of the universe in the acts of worship and devotion. It consists in justice, humanity, and mercy; in a fair and candid mind, a generous and affectionate heart; accompanied with temperance, self-government, and a perpetual regard in all our actions to conscience, and to the law of God. A religious, and a thoroughly virtuous character, therefore, I consider as the same.

By the true honour of man is to be understood, not what merely commands external respect, but what commands the respect of the heart; what raises one to acknowledged eminence above others of the same species; what always creates esteem, and in its highest degree produces veneration. The question now before us is, From what cause this eminence arises? By what means is it to be attained?

I SAY, first, From riches it does not arise. These, we all know, may belong to the vilest of mankind. Providence has scattered them among the crowd with an undistinguishing hand, as of purpose to show of what small account they are in the sight of God. Experience every day proves that the possession of them is consistent with the most general contempt. On this point, therefore, I conceive it not necessary to insist any longer.

NEITHER does the honour of man arise from mere dignity of rank or office. Were such distinctions always, or even generally, obtained in consequence of uncommon merit, they would indeed confer honour on the character. But, in the present state of society, it is too well known that this is not the case. They are often the consequence of birth alone. They are sometimes the fruit of mere dependance and assiduity. They may be the recompense of flattery, versatility, and intrigue; and so be conjoined with meanness and baseness of character. To persons graced with noble birth, or placed in high stations, much external honour is due. This is what the subordination of society necessarily requires; and what every good

member of it will cheerfully yield. But how often has it happened that such persons, when externally respected, are, nevertheless, despised by men in their hearts; nay, sometimes execrated by the public? Their elevation, if they have been unworthy of it, is so far from procuring them true honour, that it only renders their insignificance, perhaps their infamy, more conspicuous. By drawing attention to their conduct, it discovers in the most glaring light how little they deserved the station which they possess.

I MUST next observe, That the proper honour of man arises not from some of those splendid actions and abilities which excite high admiration. Courage and prowess, military renown, signal victories and conquests, may render the name of a man famous, without rendering his character truly honourable. To many brave men, to many heroes renowned in story, we look up with wonder. Their exploits are recorded. Their praises are sung. They stand as on an eminence, above the rest of mankind. Their eminence, nevertheless, may not be of that sort before which we bow with inward esteem and respect. Something more is wanted for that purpose, than the conquering arm, and the intrepid mind. The laurels of the warrior must at all times be dyed in blood, and bedewed with the tears of the widow and the orphan. But if they have been stained by rapine and inhumanity; if sordid avarice has marked his character; or low and gross sensuality has degraded his life; the great hero sinks into a little man. What at a distance, or on a superficial view, we admire, becomes mean, perhaps odious, when we examine it more closely. It is like the colossal statue, whose immense size struck the spectator afar off with astonishment; but when nearly viewed, it appears disproportioned, unshapely, and rude.

Observations of the same kind may be applied to all the reputation derived from civil accomplishments; from the refined politics of the statesman; or the literary efforts of genius and erudition. These bestow, and, within certain bounds, ought to bestow, eminence and distinction on men. They discover talents which in themselves are shining; and which become highly valuable, when employed in advancing the good of mankind. Hence, they frequently give rise to fame. But a distinction is to be made between fame and true honour. The former is a loud and noisy applause, the latter, a more silent and internal homage. Fame floats on the breath of the multitude: Honour rests on the judgment of the thinking. Fame may give praise while it withholds esteem: True honour implies esteem mingled with respect. The one regards particular distinguished talents; the other looks up to the whole character. Hence the statesman, the orator, or the poet, may be famous; while yet the man himself is far from being honoured. We envy his abilities. We wish to rival them. But we would not choose to be classed with him who possessed them. Instances of this sort are too often found in every record of ancient or modern history.

From all this it follows, That, in order to discern where man's true honour lies, we must look, not to any adventitious circumstance of fortune; not to any single sparkling quality; but to the whole of

what forms a man; what entitles him, as such, to rank high among that class of beings to which he belongs; in a word, we must look to the mind and the soul. — A mind superiour to fear, to selfish interest and corruption; a mind governed by the principles of uniform constitude and integrity; the same in prosperity and adversity; which no bribe can seduce, nor terror overawe; neither by pleasure melted into effeminacy, nor by distress sunk into dejection; such is the mind which forms the distinction and eminence of men. — One, who in no situation of life is either ashamed or afraid of discharging his duty, and acting his proper part with firmness and constancy; true to the God whom he worships, and true to the faith in which he professes to believe; full of affection to his brethren of mankind; faithful to his friends, generous to his enemies, warm with compassion to the unfortunate; self-denying to little private interests and pleasures, but zealous for public interest and happiness; magnanimous, without being proud; humble, without being mean; just, without being harsh: simple in his manners, but manly in his feelings; on whose word you can entirely rely; whose countenance never deceives you; whose professions of kindness are the effusions of his heart; one, in fine, whom, independent of any views of advantage, you would choose for a superiour, could trust in as a friend, and could love as a brother: — This is the man, whom in your heart, above all others, you do, you must, honour.

SUCH a character, imperfectly as it has now been drawn, all must acknowledge to be formed solely by the influence of steady religion and virtue. It is the effect of principles which, operating on conscience, determine it uniformly to pursue *whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report, if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise.** By those means, wisdom, as the text asserts, bringeth us to honour.

IN confirmation of this doctrine it is to be observed, that the honour which man acquires by religion and virtue is more independent and more complete, than what can be acquired by any other means. It is independent of any thing foreign or external. It is not partial, but entire respect which it procures. Wherever fortune is concerned, it is the station or rank which commands our difference. Where some shining quality attracts admiration, it is only to a part of the character that we pay homage. But when a person is distinguished for eminent worth and goodness, it is the man, the whole man, whom we respect. The honour which he possesses is intrinsic. Place him in any situation of life, even an obscure one; let room only be given for his virtues to come forth and show themselves, and you will revere him as a private citizen; or as the father of a family. If in higher life he appear more illustrious, this is not owing merely to the respect created by rank. It is, because there a nobler sphere of action is opened to him; because his virtues are brought forth into more extended exertion; and placed in such conspicuous view, that he appears to grace and adorn the station which he fills. Even in

* Philip. iv. 8.

the silence of retirement, or in the retreat of old age, such a man sinks not into forgotten obscurity: his remembered virtues continue to be honoured, when their active exertions are over; and to the last stage of life he is followed by public esteem and respect. Whereas, if genuine worth be wanting, the applause which may have attended a man for a while, by degrees dies away. Though, for a part of his life, he had dazzled the world, this was owing to his deficiency in the essential qualities having not been suspected. As soon as the imposture is discovered, the falling star sinks in darkness.—There is, therefore, a standard of independent, intrinsic worth, to which we must bring in the end whatever claims to be honourable among men. By this we must measure it; and it will always be found, that nothing but what is essential to man has power to command the respect of man's heart.

It is to be farther observed, That the universal consent of mankind in honouring real virtue, is sufficient to show what the genuine sense of human nature is on this subject. All other claims of honour are ambulatory and changeable. The degrees of respect paid to external stations vary with forms of government, and fashions of the times. Qualities which in one country are highly honoured, in another are lightly esteemed. Nay, what in some regions of the earth distinguishes a man above others, might elsewhere expose him to contempt or ridicule. But where was ever the nation on the face of the globe, who did not honour unblemished worth, unaffected piety, steadfast, humane, and regular virtue? To whom were altars erected in the Heathen world, but to those whom their merits and heroic labours, by their invention of useful arts, or by some signal acts of beneficence to their country, or to mankind, were found worthy, in their opinion, to be transferred from among men, and added to the number of the gods?—Even the counterfeited appearances of virtue, which are so often found in the world, are testimonies to its praise. The hypocrite knows that, without assuming the garb of virtue, every other advantage he can possess, is insufficient to procure him esteem. Interference of interest, or perversity of disposition, may occasionally lead individuals to oppose, even to hate, the upright and the good. But however the characters of such persons may be mistaken or misrepresented, yet, as far as they are acknowledged to be virtuous, the profligate dare not traduce them. Genuine virtue has a language that speaks to every heart throughout the world. It is a language which is understood by all. In every region, every clime, the homage paid to it is the same. In no one sentiment were ever mankind more generally agreed.

FINALLY, The honour acquired by religion and virtue is honour divine and immortal. It is honour, not in the estimation of men only, but in the sight of God; whose judgment is the standard of truth and right; whose approbation confers a *crown of glory that fadeth not away*. All the honour we can gain among men is limited and confined. Its circle is narrow. Its duration is short and transitory. But the honour which is founded on true goodness, accompanies through the whole progress of our existence. It enters

with man into a future state; and continues to brighten throughout eternal ages. What procured him respect on earth, shall render him estimable among the great assembly of angels, and *spirits of just men made perfect*; where, we are assured, they who have been eminent in righteousness shall *shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever.** — Earthly honours are both short-lived in their continuance, and, while they last, tarnished with spots and stains. On some quarter or other, their brightness is obscured; their exaltation is humbled. But the honour which proceeds from God, and virtue, is unmixed and pure. It is a lustre which is derived from heaven; and is likened, in Scripture, to *the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; to the light which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*† Whereas the honours which the world confers, resemble the feeble and twinkling flame of a taper; which is often clouded by the smoke it sends forth; is always waiting, and soon dies totally away.

LET him, therefore, who retains any sense of human dignity; who feels within him that desire of honour which is congenial to man, aspire to the gratification of this passion by methods which are worthy of his nature. Let him not rest on any of those external distinctions which vanity has contrived to introduce. These can procure him no more than the semblance of respect. Let him not be flattered by the applause which some occasional display of abilities may have gained him. That applause may be mingled with contempt. Let him look to what will dignify his character as a man. Let him cultivate those moral qualities which all men in their hearts respect. *Wisdom shall then give to his head an ornament of grace, a crown of glory shall she deliver to him.* This is an honour to which all may aspire. It is a prize for which every one, whether of high or low rank, may contend. It is always in his power so to distinguish himself by worthy and virtuous conduct, as to command the respect of those around him; and, what is highest of all, to obtain praise and honour from God.

LET no one imagine that in the religious part of this character there is any thing which casts over it a gloomy shade, or derogates from that esteem which men are generally disposed to yield to exemplary virtues. False ideas may be entertained of religion; as false and imperfect conceptions of virtue have often prevailed in the world. But to true religion there belongs no sullen gloom; no melancholy austerity, tending to withdraw men from human society, or to diminish the exertions of active virtue. On the contrary, the religious principle, rightly understood, not only unites with all such virtues, but supports, fortifies, and confirms them. It is so far from obscuring the lustre of a character, that it heightens and ennobles it. It adds to all the moral virtues a venerable and authoritative dignity. It renders the virtuous character more august. To the decorations of a palace, it joins the majesty of a temple.

He who divides religion from virtue, understands neither the one nor the other. It is the union of the two, which consummates the

* Dan. xii. 3.

† 2 Sam. xxiii. 4. Prov. iv. 18.

human character and state. It is their union which has distinguished those great and illustrious men, who have shone with so much honour in former ages; and whose memory lives in the remembrance of succeeding generations. It is their union which forms that *wisdom which is from above*; that wisdom to which the Text ascribes such high effects; and to which belongs the sublime encomium given of it by an author of one of the apocryphal books of Scripture; with whose beautiful and emphatical expressions I conclude this Discourse. *The memorial of virtue is immortal. It is known with God, and with men. When it is present, men take example at it; and when it is gone, they desire it: It weareth a crown, and triumpheth for ever; having gotten the victory, striving for undefiled rewards. Wisdom is the breath of the power of God, and a pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty: Therefore can no defiled thing fall into her. She is the brightness of the everlasting light; the unspotted mirror of the power of God; and the image of his goodness. Remaining in herself, she maketh all things new; and in all ages entering into holy souls, she maketh them friends of God, and prophets: For God loveth none but him that dwelleth with Wisdom. She is more beautiful than the sun; and above all the order of the stars: Being compared with light, she is found before it.**

SERMON XXXII.

ON SENSIBILITY.

ROM. xii. 15.

Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

THE amiable spirit of our holy religion appears in nothing more than in the care it hath taken to enforce on men the social duties of life. This is one of the clearest characteristics of its being a religion whose origin is divine: For every doctrine which proceeds from the Father of mercies will undoubtedly breathe benevolence and humanity. This is the scope of the two exhortations in the Text, to *rejoice with them that rejoice*, and to *weep with them that weep*; the one calculated to promote the happiness, the other to alleviate the sorrows, of our fellow-creatures; both concurring to form that temper which interests us in the concerns of our brethren; which disposes us to feel along with them, to take part in their joys, and in their sorrows. This temper is known by the name of Sensibility; a word which in modern times we hear in the mouth of every one; a quality which every one affects to possess; in itself a most amiable and worthy disposition of mind, but often mistaken and abused; employed as a cover, sometimes to a capricious humour, sometimes to selfish passions. I shall endeavour to explain the nature of true sensibility. I shall consider its effects; and, after showing its advantages, shall point out the abuses and mistaken forms of this virtue.

* Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 1, 2. — vii. 25, 26, 27, 28, 29.

THE original constitution of our nature with respect to the mixture of selfish and social affections, discovers in this, as in every other part of our frame, profound and admirable wisdom. Each individual is, by his Creator, committed particularly to himself, and his own care. He has it more in his power to promote his own welfare, than any other person can possibly have to promote it. It was therefore fit, it was necessary, that, in each individual, self-love should be the strongest and most active instinct. This self-love, if he had been a being who stood solitary and alone, might have proved sufficient for the purpose both of his preservation and his welfare. But such is not the situation of man. He is mixed among multitudes of the same nature. In these multitudes, the self-love of one man, or attention to his particular interests, encountering the self-love and the interests of another, could not but produce frequent opposition, and innumerable mischiefs. It was necessary, therefore, to provide a counterbalance to this part of his nature; which is accordingly done by implanting in him those social and benevolent instincts which lead him in some measure out of himself, to follow the interest of others. The strength of these social instincts is, in general, proportioned to their importance in human life. Hence that degree of sensibility which prompts us to *weep with them that weep*, is stronger than that which prompts us to *rejoice with them that rejoice*; for this reason, that the unhappy stand more in need of our fellow-feeling and assistance than the prosperous. Still, however, it was requisite, that, in each individual, the quantity of self-love should remain in a large proportion, on account of its importance to the preservation of his life and well-being. But as the quantity requisite for this purpose is apt both to engross his attention, and to carry him into criminal excesses, the perfection of his nature is measured by the due counterpoise of those social principles, which, tempering the force of the selfish affection, render man equally useful to himself, and to those with whom he is joined in society. Hence the use and the value of that sensibility of which we now treat.

THAT it constitutes an essential part of a religious character, there can be no doubt. Not only are the words of the Text express to this purpose, but the whole New Testament abounds with passages which enjoin the cultivation of this disposition. Being *all one body, and members one of another*, we are commanded to *love our neighbour as ourself*; to *look every man, not on his own things only, but on those of others also*; to *be pitiful, to be courteous, to be tender-hearted*; to *bear one another's burdens, and so to fulfil the law of Christ*.^{*} The dispositions opposite to sensibility are cruelty, hardness of heart, contracted attachment to worldly interests; which every one will admit to be directly opposite to the Christian character. According to the different degrees of constitutional warmth in men's affections, sensibility may, even among the virtuous, prevail in different proportions. For all derive not from nature the same happy delicacy, and tenderness of feeling. With some, the heart melts, and relents, in kind emotions, much more easily than with others. But with

* Luke, x. 27. Philip. ii. 4. 1 Pet. iii. 8. Galat. vi. 2.

every one who aspires at the character of a good man, it is necessary that the humane and compassionate dispositions should be found. There must be that within him which shall form him to feel in some degree with the heart of a brother; and when he beholds others enjoying happiness, or sees them sunk in sorrow, shall bring his affections to accord, and, if we may speak so, to sound a note in unison to theirs. This is to *rejoice with them that rejoice*, and to *weep with them that weep*. How much this temper belongs to the perfection of our nature, we learn from one who exhibited that perfection in its highest degree. When our Lord Jesus, on a certain occasion, came to the grave of a beloved friend, and saw his relations mourning around it, he presently caught the impression of their sorrow; *he groaned in spirit, and was troubled*. He knew that he was about to remove the cause of their distress, by recalling Lazarus to life: Yet, in the moment of grief, his heart sympathised with theirs; and, together with the weeping friends, *Jesus wept*. *

LET us next proceed to consider the effect of this virtuous sensibility on our character, and our state. I shall consider it in two views; its influence on our moral conduct, and its influence on our happiness.

FIRST, It powerfully influences the proper discharge of all the relative and social duties of life. Without some discharge of those duties, there could be no comfort or security in human society. Men would become hordes of savages, perpetually harassing one another. In one way or other, therefore, the great duties of social life must be performed. There must be among mankind some reciprocal co-operation and aid. In this, all consent. But let us observe, that these duties may be performed from different principles, and in different ways. Sometimes they are performed merely from decency, and regard to character; sometimes from fear, and even from selfishness, which obliges men to show kindness, in order that they may receive returns of it. In such cases, the exterior of fair behaviour may be preserved. But all will admit, that when from constraint only the offices of seeming kindness are performed, little dependance can be placed on them, and little value allowed to them.

By others, these offices are discharged solely from a principle of duty. They are men of cold affections, and perhaps of an interested character. But, overawed by a sense of religion, and convinced that they are bound to be beneficent, they fulfil the course of relative duties with regular tenour. Such men act from conscience and principle. So far they do well, and are worthy of praise. They assist their friends; they give to the poor; they do justice to all. But what a different complexion is given to the same actions, how much higher flavour do they acquire, when they flow from the sensibility of a feeling heart! If one be not moved by affection, even supposing him influenced by principle, he will go no farther than strict principle appears to require. He will advance slowly, and reluctantly. As it is justice, not generosity, which impels him, he will often feel as a task what he is required by conscience to perform. Whereas, to him

* John, xi. 35.

who is prompted by virtuous sensibility, every office of beneficence and humanity is a pleasure. He gives, assists, and relieves, not merely because he is bound to do so, but because it would be painful for him to refrain. Hence, the smallest benefit he confers rises in its value, on account of its carrying the affection of the giver impressed upon the gift. It speaks his heart; and the discovery of the heart is very frequently of greater consequence than all that liberality can bestow. How often will the affectionate smile of approbation gladden the humble, and raise the dejected? How often will the look of tender sympathy, or the tear that involuntarily falls, impart consolation to the unhappy? By means of this correspondence of hearts, all the great duties which we owe to one another, are both performed to more advantage, and endeared in the performance. From true sensibility flow a thousand good offices, apparently small in themselves, but of high importance to the felicity of others: offices which altogether escape the observation of the cold and unfeeling, who, by the hardness of their manner, render themselves unamiable, even when they mean to do good. How happy, then, would it be for mankind, if this affectionate disposition prevailed more generally in the world! How much would the sum of public virtue and public felicity be increased, if men were always inclined to *rejoice with them that rejoice, and to weep with them that weep!*

BUT, besides the effect of such a temper on general virtue and happiness, let us consider its effect on the happiness of him who possesses it, and the various pleasures to which it gives him access. If he be master of riches or influence, it affords him the means of increasing his own enjoyment, by relieving the wants, or increasing the comforts, of others. If he command not these advantages, yet all the comforts which he sees in the possession of the deserving, become in some sort his, by his rejoicing in the good which they enjoy. Even the face of nature yields a satisfaction to him which the insensible can never know. The profusion of goodness which he beholds poured forth on the universe, dilates his heart with the thought that innumerable multitudes around him are blest and happy. When he sees the labours of men appearing to prosper, and views a country flourishing in wealth and industry; when he beholds the spring coming forth in its beauty, and reviving the decayed face of nature; or in autumn beholds the fields loaded with plenty, and the year crowned with all its fruits; he lifts his affections with gratitude to the great Father of all, and rejoices in the general felicity and joy.

It may indeed be objected, that the same sensibility lays open the heart to be pierced with many wounds from the distresses which abound in the world; exposes us to frequent suffering from the participation which it communicates, of the sorrows, as well as of the joys of friendship. But let it be considered, that the tender melancholy of sympathy is accompanied with a sensation, which they who feel it would not exchange for the gratifications of the selfish. When the heart is strongly moved by any of the kind affections, even when it pours itself forth in virtuous sorrow, a secret attractive charm mingles with the painful emotion; there is a joy in the midst of grief.

Let it be farther considered, that the griefs which sensibility introduces are counterbalanced by pleasures which flow from the same source. Sensibility heightens in general the human powers, and is connected with acuteness in all our feelings. If it makes us more alive to some painful sensations, in return it renders the pleasing ones more vivid and animated. The selfish man languishes in his narrow circle of pleasures. They are confined to what affects his own interest. He is obliged to repeat the same gratifications, till they become insipid. But the man of virtuous sensibility moves in a wider sphere of felicity. His powers are much more frequently called forth into occupations of pleasing activity. Numberless occasions open to him, of indulging his favourite taste, by conveying satisfaction to others. Often it is in his power, in one way or other, to sooth the afflicted heart, to carry some consolation into the house of woe. In the scenes of ordinary life, in the domestic and social intercourses of men, the cordiality of his affections cheers and gladdens him. Every appearance, every description of innocent happiness, is enjoyed by him. Every native expression of kindness and affection among others, is felt by him, even though he be not the object of it. Among a circle of friends, enjoying one another, he is as happy as the happiest. In a word, he lives in a different sort of world from what the selfish man inhabits. He possesses a new sense, which enables him to behold objects which the selfish cannot see. At the same time, his enjoyments are not of that kind which remain merely on the surface of the mind. They penetrate the heart. They enlarge and elevate, they refine and ennoble it. To all the pleasing emotions of affection, they add the dignified consciousness of virtue.—Children of Men! Men formed by nature to live and to feel as brethren! How long will ye continue to estrange yourselves from one another by competitions and jealousies, when in cordial union ye might be so much more blest? How long will ye seek your happiness in selfish gratifications alone, neglecting those purer and better sources of joy, which flow from the affections and the heart?

HAVING now explained the nature, and shown the value and high advantages of true sensibility, I proceed to point out some of the mistaken forms, and abuses of this virtue.—In modern times, the chief improvement of which we have to boast, is a sense of humanity. This, notwithstanding the selfishness that still prevails, is the favourite and distinguishing virtue of the age. On general manners, and on several departments of society, it has had considerable influence. It has abated the spirit of persecution; it has even tempered the horrors of war; and man is now more ashamed, than he was in some former ages, of acting as a savage to man. Hence, sensibility is become so reputable a quality, that the appearance of it is frequently assumed when the reality is wanting. Softness of manners must not be mistaken for true sensibility. Sensibility indeed tends to produce gentleness in behaviour; and when such behaviour flows from native affection, it is valuable and amiable. But the exterior manner alone may be learned in the school of the world; and often, too often, is found to cover much unfeeling hardness of heart. Pro-

essions of sensibility on every trifling occasion, joined with the appearance of excessive softness, and a profusion of sentimental language, afford always much ground for distrust. They create the suspicion of a studied character. Frequently, under a negligent and seemingly rough manner, there lies a tender and feeling heart. Manliness and sensibility are so far from being incompatible, that the truly brave are for the most part generous and humane; while the soft and effeminate are hardly capable of any vigorous exertion of affection.

As sensibility supposes delicacy of feeling with respect to others, they who affect the highest sensibility are apt to carry this delicacy to excess. They are, perhaps, not incapable of the warmth of disinterested friendship; but they are become so refined in all their sensations; they entertain such high notions of what ought to correspond in the feelings of others to their own; they are so mightily hurt by every thing which comes not up to their ideal standard of reciprocal affection, as to produce disquiet and uneasiness to all with whom they are connected. Hence, unjust suspicions of their friends; hence, groundless upbraidings and complaints of unkindness; hence, a proneness to take violent offence at trifles. In consequence of examining their friends with a microscopic eye, what to an ordinary observer would not be displeasing, to them is grating and disgusting. At the bottom of the character of such persons, there always lie much pride and attention to themselves. This is indeed a false species of sensibility. It is the substitution of a capricious and irritable delicacy, in the room of that plain and native tenderness of heart, which prompts men to view others with an indulgent eye, and to make great allowances for the imperfections which are sometimes adherent to the most amiable qualities.

THERE are others who affect not sensibility to this extreme, but who found high claims to themselves upon the degree of interest which they take in the concerns of others. Although their sensibility can produce no benefit to the person who is its object, they always conceive that it entitles themselves to some profitable returns. These, often, are persons of refined and artful character; who partly deceive themselves, and partly employ their sensibility as a cover to interest. He who acts from genuine affection, when he is feeling along with others in their joys or sorrows, thinks not of any recompence to which this gives him a title. He follows the impulse of his heart. He obeys the dictates of his nature; just as the vine by its nature produces fruit, and the fountain pours forth its streams. Wherever views of interest, and prospects of return, mingle with the feelings of affection, sensibility acts an imperfect part, and entitles us to small share of praise.

BUT, supposing it to be both complete and pure, I must caution you against resting the whole merit of your character on sensibility alone. It is indeed a happy constitution of mind. It fits men for the proper discharge of many duties, and gives them access to many virtuous pleasures. It is requisite for our acceptance either with God or man. At the same time, if it remain an instinctive feeling alone,

it will form no more than an imperfect character. Complete virtue is of a more exalted and dignified nature. It supposes sensibility, good temper, and benevolent affections; it includes them as essential parts; but it reaches farther: It supposes them to be strengthened and confirmed by principle; it requires them to be supported by justice, temperance, fortitude, and all those other virtues which enable us to act with propriety in the trying situations of life.

It is very possible for a man to possess the kind affections in a high degree, while at the same time he is carried away by passion and pleasure into many criminal deeds. Almost every man values himself on possessing virtue in one or other of its forms. He wishes to lay claim to some quality which will render him estimable in his own eye, as well as in that of the public. Hence it is common for many, especially for those in the higher classes of life, to take much praise to themselves on account of their sensibility, though it be, in truth, a sensibility of a very defective kind. They relent at the view of misery when it is strongly set before them. Often too, affected chiefly by the powers of description, it is at feigned and pictured distress, more than at real misery, that they relent. The tears which they shed upon these occasions, they consider as undoubted proofs of virtue. They applaud themselves for the goodness of their hearts; and conclude, that with such feelings they cannot fail to be agreeable to Heaven. At the same time, these transient relentings make slight impression on conduct. They give rise to few, if any, good deeds; and soon after such persons have wept at some tragical tale, they are ready to stretch forth the hand of oppression, to grasp at the gain of injustice, or to plunge into the torrent of criminal pleasures. This sort of sensibility affords no more than a fallacious claim to virtue, and gives men no ground to think highly of themselves. We must inquire, not merely how they feel, but how their feelings prompt them to act, in order to ascertain their real character.

I SHALL conclude with observing, that sensibility, when genuine and pure, has a strong connection with piety. That warmth of affection and tenderness of heart, which lead men to feel for their brethren, and to enter into their joys and sorrows, should naturally dispose them to melt at the remembrance of the Divine goodness; to glow with admiration of the Divine Majesty; to send up the voice of praise and adoration to that Supreme Being who makes his creatures happy. He who pretends to great sensibility towards men, and yet has no feeling for the high objects of religion, no heart to admire and adore the great Father of the universe, has reason to distrust the truth and delicacy of his sensibility. He has reason to suspect, that in some corner of his heart there lodges a secret depravity, an unnatural hardness and callousness, which vitiate his character. — Let us study to join all the parts of virtue in proper union; to be consistently and uniformly good; just and upright, as well as pitiful and courteous; pious, as well as sympathising. Let us pray to Him who made the heart, that he would fill it with all proper dispositions; rectify all its errors; and render it the happy abode of personal integrity and social tenderness, of purity, benevolence, and devotion.

SERMON XXXIII.

ON THE IMPROVEMENT OF TIME.

GENESIS, xlvii. 8.

And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old art thou?

TIME is of so great importance to mankind, that it cannot too often employ religious meditation. There is nothing in the management of which, wisdom is more requisite, or where mankind display their inconsistency more. In its particular parcels, they appear entirely careless of it; and throw it away with thoughtless profusion. But, when collected into some of its great portions, and viewed as the measure of their continuance in life, they become sensible of its value, and begin to regard it with a serious eye. While day after day is wasted in a course of idleness or vicious pleasures, if some incident shall occur which leads the most inconsiderate man to think of his age, or time of life; how much of it is gone; at what period of it he is now arrived; and to what proportion of it he can with any probability look forward, as yet to come; he can hardly avoid feeling some secret compunction, and reflecting seriously upon his state. Happy, if that virtuous impression were not of momentary continuance, but retained its influence amidst the succeeding cares and pleasures of the world! To the good old Patriarch mentioned in the Text, we have reason to believe that such impressions were habitual. The question put to him by the Egyptian monarch produced, in his answer, such reflections as were naturally suited to his time of life. *And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage are an hundred and thirty years: Few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers, in the days of their pilgrimage.* But the peculiar circumstances of the Patriarch, or the number of his years, are not to be the subject of our present consideration. My purpose is to show how we should be affected in every period of human life, by reflection upon our age, whether we be young or advanced in years; in order that the question, *How old art thou?* may never be put to any of us without some good effect. There are three different portions of our life which such a question naturally calls to view; that part of it which is past; that which is now present; and that to which we fondly look forward, as future. Let us consider in what manner we ought to be affected by attending to each of these.

I. LET us review that part of our time which is past. According to the progress which we have made in the journey of life, the field which past years present to our review will be more or less extensive. But to every one they will be found to afford sufficient matter of humiliation and regret. For where is the person who, having acted for any time in the world, remembers not many errors and many follies in his past behaviour? Who dares to say, that he has improved, as he might have done, the various advantages which were

afforded him; and that he recalls nothing for which he has reason either to grieve, or to blush? When we recollect the several stages of life through which we have passed; the successive occupations in which we have been engaged, the designs we have formed, and the hopes and fears which alternately have filled our breast; how barren for most part is the remembrance; and how few traces of any thing valuable or important remain! Like characters drawn on the sand, which the next wave washes totally away; so one trivial succession of events has effaced the memory of the preceding; and though we have seemed all along to be busy, yet for much of what we have acted, we are neither wiser nor better than if such actions had never been. Hence let the retrospect of what is past produce, as its first effect, humiliation in our own eyes, and abasement before God. Much do human pride and self-complacency require some correction; and that correction is never more effectually administered, than by an impartial and serious review of former life.

But, though past time be gone, we are not to consider it as irredeemably lost. To a very profitable purpose it may yet be applied, if we lay hold of it while it remains in remembrance, and oblige it to contribute to future improvement. If you have gained nothing more by the years that are past, you have at least gained experience; and experience is the mother of wisdom. You have seen the weak parts of your character; and may have discovered the chief sources of your misconduct. To these, let your attention be directed; on these, let the proper guards be set. If you have trifled long, resolve to trifle no more. If your passions have often betrayed and degraded you, study how they may be kept, in future, under better discipline. Learn, at the same time, never to trust presumptuously in your own wisdom. Humbly apply to the Author of your being, and beseech his grace to guide you safely through those slippery and dangerous paths, in which experience has shown that you are so ready to err, and to fall.

In reviewing past life, it cannot but occur, that many things now appear of inconsiderable importance, which once occupied and attached us, in the highest degree. Where are those keen competitions, those mortifying disappointments, those violent enmities, those eager pursuits, which we once thought were to last for ever, and on which we considered our whole happiness or misery as suspended? We look back upon them now, as upon a dream which has passed away. None of those mighty consequences have followed which we had predicted. The airy fabric has vanished, and left no trace behind it. We smile at our former violence; and wonder how such things could have ever appeared so significant and great. We may rest assured, that what hath been shall again be. When time shall once have laid his lenient hand on the passions and pursuits of the present moment, they too shall lose that imaginary value which heated fancy now bestows upon them. Hence, let them already begin to subside to their proper level. Let wisdom diffuse a tincture of moderation into the eagerness of contest, by anticipating that

period of coolness, which the lapse of time will, of itself, certainly bring. — When we look back on years that are past, how swiftly do they appear to have fled away! How insensibly has one period of life stolen upon us after another, like the successive incidents in *a tale that is told*! Before we were aware, childhood had grown up into youth; youth had passed into manhood; and manhood now, perhaps, begins to assume the grey hair, and to decline into old age. When we are carrying our views forward, months and years to come seem to stretch through a long and extensive space. But when the time shall arrive of our looking back, they shall appear contracted within narrow bounds. Time, when yet before us, seems to advance with slow and tardy steps; no sooner is it past, than we discern its wings.

It is a remarkable peculiarity in the retrospect of former life, that it is commonly attended with some measure of heaviness of heart. Even to the most prosperous, the memory of joys that are past is accompanied with secret sorrow. In the days of former years, many objects arise to view, which make the most unthinking, grave; and render the serious, sad. The pleasurable scenes of youth, the objects on which our affections had been early placed, the companions and friends with whom we had spent many happy days, even the places and the occupations to which we had been long accustomed, but to which we have now bidden farewell, can hardly ever be recalled, without softening, nor, sometimes, without piercing the heart. Such sensations, to which few, if any, of my hearers are wholly strangers, I now mention, as affording a strong proof of that vanity of the human state, which is often represented in the sacred writings: And vain indeed must that state be, where shades of grief tinge the recollection of its brightest scenes. But, at the same time, though it be very proper that such meditations should sometimes enter the mind, yet on them I advise not the gentle and tender heart to dwell too long. They are apt to produce a fruitless melancholy; to deject, without bringing much improvement; to thicken the gloom which already hangs over human life, without furnishing proportionable assistance to virtue.

Let me advise you, rather to recal to view such parts of former conduct, if any such there be, as afford in the remembrance a rational satisfaction. And what parts of conduct are these? Are they the pursuits of sensual pleasure, the riots of jollity, or the displays of show and vanity? No: I appeal to your hearts, my friends, if what you recollect with most pleasure be not the innocent, the virtuous, the honourable parts of your past life; when you were employed in cultivating your minds, and improving them with useful knowledge; when, by regular application and persevering labour, you were laying the foundation of future reputation and advancement; when you were occupied in discharging with fidelity the duties of your station, and acquiring the esteem of the worthy and the good; when, in some trying situation, you were enabled to act your part with firmness and honour; or had seized the happy opportunity of assisting the deserving, of relieving the distressed, and bringing down upon your heads

the *blessings of those that were ready to perish. — These, these are the parts of former life which are recalled with most satisfaction ! On them alone, no heaviness of heart attends. You enjoy them as a treasure which is now stored up, and put beyond all danger of being lost. These cheer the hours of sadness, lighten the burden of old age, and, through the mortifying remembrance of much of the past, dart a ray of light and joy. — From the review of these, and the comparison of them with the deceitful pleasures of sin, let us learn how to form our estimate of happiness. Let us learn what is true, what is false, in human pleasures ; and from experience of the past, judge of the quarter to which we must in future turn, if we would lay a foundation for permanent satisfaction. After having thus reviewed the former years of our life, let us consider,*

II. *WHAT attention is due to that period of age in which we are at present placed. Here lies the immediate and principal object of our concern : For the recollection of the past is only as far of moment, as it acts upon the present. The past, to us now, is little ; the future, as yet, is nothing. Between these two great gulphs of time subsists the present, as an isthmus or bridge, along which we are all passing. With hasty and inconsiderate steps let us not pass along it ; but remember well, how much depends upon our holding a steady and properly conducted course. Whatsoever thine hand findeth to do, do it now with all thy might ; for now is the accepted time ; now is the day of salvation. Many directions might be given for the wise and religious improvement of the present ; a few of which only I shall hint.*

Let us begin with excluding those superfluous avocations which unprofitably consume it. Life is short ; much that is of real importance remains to be done. If we suffer the present time to be wasted, either in absolute idleness or in frivolous employments, it will hereafter call for vengeance against us. Removing, therefore, what is merely superfluous, let us bethink ourselves of what is most material to be attended to at present : As, first and chief, the great work of our salvation ; the discharge of the religious duties which we owe to God our Creator, and to Christ our Redeemer. *God waiteth as yet to be gracious ; whether he will wait longer, none of us can tell. Now, therefore, seek the Lord while he may be found, call upon him while he is near.* Our spiritual interests will be best promoted by regular performance of all the duties of ordinary life. Let these, therefore, occupy a great share of the present hour. Whatever our age, our character, our profession, or station in the world, requires us to do, in that let each revolving day find us busy. Never delay till to-morrow, what reason and conscience tell you ought to be performed to-day. To-morrow is not yours ; and though you should live to enjoy it, you must not overload it with a burden not its own. *Sufficient for the day will prove the duty thereof.*

The observance of order and method is of high consequence for the improvement of present time. He who performs every employment in its due place and season, suffers no part of time to escape without profit. He multiplies his days ; for he lives much in little space. Whereas he who neglects order, in the arrangement of his

occupations, is always losing the present in returning upon the past, and trying, in vain, to recover it when gone.—Let me advise you frequently to make the present employment of time an object of thought. Ask yourselves, about what are you now busied? What is the ultimate scope of your present pursuits and cares? Can you justify them to yourselves? Are they likely to produce any thing that will survive the moment, and bring forth some fruit for futurity? He who can give no satisfactory answer to such questions as these, has reason to suspect that his employment of the present is not tending either to his advantage, or his honour.—Finally, let me admonish you, that, while you study to improve, you should endeavour also to enjoy, the present hour. Let it not be disturbed with groundless discontents, or poisoned with foolish anxieties about what is to come: But look up to Heaven, and acknowledge, with a grateful heart, the actual blessings you enjoy. If you must admit, that you are now in health, peace, and safety; without any particular or uncommon evils to afflict your condition; what more can you reasonably look for in this vain and uncertain world? How little can the greatest prosperity add to such a state? Will any future situation ever make you happy, if now, with so few causes of grief, you imagine yourselves miserable? The evil lies in the state of your mind, not in your condition of fortune; and by no alteration of circumstances is likely to be remedied. Let us now,

III. CONSIDER with what dispositions we ought to look forward to those years of our life that may yet be to come. Merely to look forward to them, is what requires no admonition. Futurity is the great object on which the imaginations of men are employed; for the sake of which the past is forgotten, and the present too often neglected. All time is in a manner swallowed up by it. On futurity men build their designs; on futurity, they rest their hopes; and though not happy at the present, they always reckon on becoming so, at some subsequent period of their lives. This propensity to look forward was, for wise purposes, implanted in the human breast. It serves to give proper occupation to the active powers of the mind, and to quicken all its exertions. But it is too often immoderately indulged and grossly abused. The curiosity which sometimes prompts persons to inquire, by unlawful methods, into what is to come, is equally foolish and sinful. Let us restrain all desire of penetrating farther than is allowed us, into that dark and unknown region. Futurity belongs to God; and happy for us is that mysterious veil, with which his wisdom has covered it. Were it in our power to lift up the veil, and to behold what it conceals, many and many a thorn we should plant in our breasts. The proper and rational conduct of men with regard to futurity, is regulated by two considerations: First, that much of what it contains, must remain to us absolutely unknown; next, that there are also some events in which it may be certainly known and foreseen.

First, Much of futurity is, and must be, entirely unknown to us. When we speculate about the continuance of our life, and the events which are to fill it, we behold a river which is always flowing; but

which soon escapes out of our sight, and is covered with mists and darkness. Some of its windings we may endeavour to trace; but it is only for a very short way that we are able to pursue them. In endless conjectures we quickly find ourselves bewildered; and, often, the next event that happens baffles all the reasonings we had formed concerning the succession of events. The consequence which follows from this is, that all the anxiety about futurity, which passes the bounds of reasonable precaution, is unprofitable and vain. Certain measures are indeed necessary to be taken for our safety. We are not to rush forward inconsiderate and headlong. We must make, as far as we are able, provision for future welfare; and guard against dangers which apparently threaten. But having done this, we must stop; and leave the rest to Him who disposeth of futurity at his will. *He who sitteth in the heavens laughs at the wisdom and the plans of worldly men. Wherefore boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* For the same reason, despair not of to-morrow; for it may bring forth good as well as evil. Vex not yourselves with imaginary fears. The impending black cloud, to which you look up with so much dread, may pass by harmless; or though it should discharge the storm, yet, before it breaks, you may be lodged in that lowly mansion which no storms ever touch.

In the next place, There are in futurity some events which may be certainly foretold by us, through all its darkness. First, it may be confidently predicted, that no situation into which it will bring us, shall ever answer fully to our hopes, or confer perfect happiness. This is certain as if we already saw it, that life, in its future periods, will continue to be what it has heretofore been; that it will be a mixed and varied state; a checquered scene of pleasures and pains, of fugitive joys and transient griefs, succeeding in a round to one another. Whether we look forward to the years of youth, or to those of manhood and advanced life, it is all the same. The world will be to us, what it has been to generations past. Set out, therefore, on what remains of your journey, under this persuasion. According to this measure, estimate your future pleasures; and calculate your future gains. Carry always along with you, a modest and a temperate mind. Let not your expectations from the years that are to come rise too high; and your disappointments will be fewer, and more easily supported.

Farther; This may be reckoned upon as certain, that, in every future situation of life, a good conscience, a well-ordered mind, and a humble trust in the favour of Heaven, will prove the essential ingredients of your happiness. In reflecting upon the past, you have found this to hold. Assure yourselves that, in future, the case will be the same. The principal correctives of human vanity and distress must be sought for in religion and virtue. Entering on paths which to you are new and unknown, place yourselves under the conduct of a Divine guide. Follow the great Shepherd of Israel, who, amidst the turmoil of this world, leads his flock into green pastures, and by the still waters. As you advance in life, study to improve

both in good principles and in good practice. You will be enabled to look to futurity without fear, if, whatever it brings, it shall find you regularly employed in *doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with the Lord your God.*

Lastly, Whatever other things may be dubious in futurity, two great events are undoubtedly certain, death and judgment. These, we all know, are to terminate the whole course of time; and we know them to be not only certain, but to be approaching nearer to us, in consequence of every day that passes over our heads. To these, therefore, let us look forward, not with the dread of children, but with that manly seriousness which belongs to men and Christians. Let us not avert our view from them, as if we could place them at some greater distance by excluding them from our thoughts. This, indeed, is the refuge of too many; but it is the refuge of fools, who aggravate thereby the terrors they must encounter. For *he that cometh, shall come, and will not tarry.* To his coming, let us look with a steady eye; and as life advances through its progressive stages, prepare for its close, and for appearing before Him who made us.

THUS I have endeavoured to point out the reflections proper to be made, when the question is put to any of us, *How old art thou?* I have shown with what eye we should review the past years of our life; in what light we should consider the present; and with what dispositions look forward to the future: In order that such a question may always leave some serious impression behind it; and may dispose us *so to number the years of our life, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.*

SERMON XXXIV.

ON THE DUTIES BELONGING TO MIDDLE AGE.

1 COR. xiii. 11.

— *When I became a man, I put away childish things.*

*To every thing, says the wise man, there is a season; and a time to every purpose under heaven.** As there are duties which belong to particular situations of fortune, so there are duties also which result from particular periods of human life. In every period of it, indeed, that comprehensive rule takes place, *Fear God, and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man.†* Piety to God, and charity to men, are incumbent upon persons of every age, as soon as they can think and act. Yet these virtues, in different stages of life, assume different forms; and when they appear in that form which is most suited to our age, they appear with peculiar gracefulness, they give propriety to conduct, and add dignity to character. In former Discourses‡, I have treated of the virtues which adorn youth, and of

* Eccles. iii. 1.

† Eccles. xii. 13.

‡ See Sermons XI. and XII.

the duties which specially belong to old age. The circle of those duties which respect middle age, is indeed much larger. As that is the busy period in the life of man, it includes in effect the whole compass of religion, and therefore cannot have its peculiar character so definitely marked and ascertained. At the same time, during those years wherein one is sensible that he has advanced beyond the confines of youth, but has not yet passed into the region of old age, there are several things which reflection on that portion of human life suggests, or at least ought to suggest, to the mind. Inconsiderate must he be, who, in his gradual progress throughout middle age, pauses not, at times, to think how far he is now receding from youth; how near he draws to the borders of declining age; what part it is now incumbent on him to act; what duties both God and the world have a title to expect from him. To these I am at present to call your attention; as what materially concern the greatest part of those who are now my hearers.

I. I BEGIN with observing, that the first duty of those who are become men, is, as the Text expresses it, to *put away childish things*. The season of youthful levities, follies, and passions, is now over. These have had their reign; a reign perhaps too long; and to which a termination is certainly proper at last. Much indulgence is due to youth. Many things admit of excuse then, which afterwards become unpardonable. Some things may even be graceful in youth, which, if not criminal, are at least ridiculous, in persons of maturer years. It is a great trial of wisdom, to make our retreat from youth with propriety; to assume the character of manhood, without exposing ourselves to reproach, by an unseasonable remainder of juvenility on the one hand, or by precise and disgusting formality on the other. Nature has placed certain boundaries, by which she discriminates the pleasures, actions, and employments, that are suited to the different stages of human life. It becomes us neither to overleap those boundaries, by a transition too hasty and violent; nor to hover too long on one side of the limit, when nature calls us to pass over to the other.

There are particularly two things in which middle age should preserve its distinction and separation from youth; these are levities of behaviour, and intemperate indulgence of pleasure. The gay spirits of the young often prompt an inconsiderate degree of levity, sometimes amusing, sometimes offensive; but for which, though betraying them occasionally into serious dangers, their want of experience may plead excuse. A more composed and manly behaviour is expected in riper years. The affectation of youthful vanities degrades the dignity of manhood; even renders its manners less agreeable; and, by ~~backward~~ attempts to please, produces contempt. Cheerfulness is becoming in every age. But the proper cheerfulness of a man is as far removed from the levity of the boy, as the flight of the eagle is from flitting of a sparrow in the air.

All unseasonable returns to the levity of youth ought to be laid aside, — an admonition which equally belongs to both the sexes, — still more are we to guard against those intemperate indulgences of

pleasure, to which the young are unhappily prone. From these we cannot too soon retreat. They open the path to ruin, in every period of our days. As long, however, as these excesses are confined to the first stage of life, hope is left, that when this fever of the spirits shall abate, sobriety may gain the ascendant, and wiser counsels have power to influence conduct. But after the season of youth is past, if its intemperate spirit remain; if, instead of listening to the calls of honour, and bending attention to the cares and the business of men, the same course of idleness and sensuality continue to be pursued, the case becomes more desperate. A sad presumption arises, that long immaturity is to prevail; and that the pleasures and passions of the youth are to sink and overwhelm the man. Difficult, I confess, it may prove to overcome the attachments which youthful habits had for a long while been forming. Hard, at the beginning, is the task, to impose on our conduct restraints which are altogether unaccustomed and new. But this is a trial which every one must undergo, in entering on new scenes of action, and new periods of life. Let those who are in this situation bethink themselves, that all is now at stake. Their character and honour, their future fortune and success in the world, depend in a great measure on the steps they take, when first they appear on the stage of active life. The world then looks to them with an observing eye. It studies their behaviour; and interprets all their motions, as presages of the line of future conduct which they mean to hold. Now, therefore, *put away childish things*; dismiss your former trifling amusements, and youthful pleasures; blast not the hopes which your friends are willing to conceive of you. Higher occupations, more serious cares, await you. Turn your mind to the steady and vigorous discharge of the part you are called to act. This leads me,

II. To point out the particular duties which open to those who are in the middle period of life. They are now come forward to that field of action where they are to mix in all the stir and bustle of the world; where all the human powers are brought forth into full exercise; where all that is conceived to be important in human affairs is incessantly going on around them. The time of youth was the preparation for future action. In old age our active part is supposed to be finished, and rest is permitted. Middle age is the season when we are expected to display the fruits which education had prepared and ripened. In this world, all of us were formed to be assistants to one another. The wants of society call for every man's labour, and require various departments to be filled up. They require that some be appointed to rule, and others to obey; some to defend the society from danger, others to maintain its internal order and peace; some to provide the conveniences of life, others to promote the improvement of the mind; many to work; others to contrive and direct. In short, within the sphere of society there is employment for every one; and, in the course of these employments, many a moral duty is to be performed; many a religious grace to be exercised. No one is permitted to be a mere blank in the world. No rank, nor station, no dignity of birth, nor extent of possessions,

exempt any man from contributing his share to public utility and good. This is the precept of God. This is the voice of nature. This is the just demand of the human race upon one another.

One of the first questions, therefore, which every man who is in the vigour of his age should put to himself is, "What am I doing in this world? What have I yet done, whereby I may glorify God, and be useful to my fellows? Do I properly fill up the place which belongs to my rank and station? Will any memorial remain of my having existed on the earth? or are my days passing fruitless away, now when I might be of some importance in the system of human affairs?"—Let not any man imagine that he is of no importance, and has, upon that account, a privilege to trifle with his days at pleasure. *Talents* have been given to all; to some *ten*; to others, *five*; to others, *two*. *Occupy with these till I come**, is the command of the great Master to all. Where superiour abilities are possessed, or distinguished advantages of fortune are enjoyed, a wider range is afforded for useful exertion, and the world is entitled to expect it. But* among those who fill up the inferiour departments of society, though the sphere of usefulness be more contracted, no one is left entirely insignificant. Let us remember, that in all stations and conditions, the important relations take place, of masters and servants, husbands and wives, parents and children, brothers and friends, citizens and subjects. The discharge of the duties arising from those various relations, forms a great portion of the work assigned to the middle age of man. Though the part we have to act may be confined within a humble line, yet if it be honourably acted, it will be always found to carry its own reward.

In fine, industry, in all its virtuous forms, ought to inspirit and invigorate mankind. This will add to it both satisfaction and dignity; will make the current of our years, as they roll, flow along in a clear and equable stream, without the putrid stagnation of sloth and idleness. Idleness is the great corrupter of youth; and the bane and dishonour of middle age. He who, in the prime of life, finds time to hang heavy on his hands, may with much reason suspect, that he has not consulted the duties which the consideration of his age imposed upon him; assuredly he has not consulted his own happiness. But, amidst all the bustle of the world, let us not forget,

III. To guard with vigilance against the peculiar dangers which attend the period of middle life. It is much to be regretted, that in the present state of things there is no period of man's age in which his virtue is not exposed to perils. Pleasure lays its snares for youth; and, after the season of youthful follies is past, other temptations, no less formidable to virtue, presently arise. The love of pleasure is succeeded by the passion for interest. In this passion the whole mind is too often absorbed; and the change thereby induced on the character, is of no amiable kind. Amidst the excesses of youth, virtuous affections often remain. The attachments of friendship, the love of honour, and the warmth of sensibility, give a degree of lustre to the character, and cover many a failing. But interest, when it

* Luke, xix. 13.

is become the ruling principle, both debases the mind and hardens the heart. It deadens the feeling of every thing that is sublime or refined. It contracts the affections within a narrow circle; and extinguishes all those sparks of generosity and tenderness which once glowed in the breast.

In proportion as worldly pursuits multiply, and competitions rise, ambition, jealousy, and envy, combine with interest to excite bad passions, and to increase the corruption of the heart. At first, perhaps, it was a man's intention to advance himself in the world by none but fair and laudable methods. He retained for some time an aversion to whatever appeared dishonourable. But here, he is encountered by the violence of an enemy. There, he is supplanted by the address of a rival. The pride of a superiour insults him. The ingratitude of a friend provokes him. Animosities ruffle his temper. Suspicions poison his mind. He finds, or imagines that he finds, the artful and designing surrounding him on every hand. He views corruption and iniquity prevailing; the modest neglected; the forward and the crafty rising to distinction. Too easily, from the example of others, he learns that mystery of vice, called the way of the world. What he has learned, he fancies necessary to practise for his own defence; and of course assumes that supple and versatile character, which he observes to be frequent, and which often has appeared to him successful.

To these, and many more dangers of the same kind, is the man exposed who is deeply engaged in active life. No small degree of firmness in religious principle, and of constancy in virtue, is requisite, in order to prevent his being assimilated to the spirit of the world, and carried away by the *multitude of evil doers*. Let him therefore call to mind those principles which ought to fortify him against such temptations to vice. Let him often recollect that, whatever his station in life may be, he is a man; he is a Christian. These are the chief characters which he has to support; characters superiour far, if they be supported with dignity, to any of the titles with which courts can decorate him; superiour to all that can be acquired in the strife of a busy world. Let him think, that though it may be desirable to increase his opulence, or to advance his rank, yet what he ought to hold much more sacred is, to maintain his integrity and honour. If these be forfeited, wealth or station will have few charms left. They will not be able to protect him long from sinking into contempt in the eye of an observing world. Even to his own eye he will at last appear base and wretched. — Let not the affairs of the world entirely engross his time and thoughts. From that contagious air which he breathes in the midst of it, let him sometimes retreat into the salutary shade consecrated to devotion and to wisdom. There, conversing seriously with his own soul, and looking up to the Father of spirits, let him study to calm those unquiet passions, and to rectify those internal disorders, which intercourse with the world had excited and increased. In order to render this medicine of the mind more effectual, it will be highly proper,

IV. THAT, as we advance in the course of years, we often attend

to the lapse of time and life, and to the revolutions which these are ever effecting. In this meditation, one of the first reflections which should occur is, how much we owe to that God who hath hitherto helped us; who hath brought us on so far in life; hath guided us through the slippery paths of youth, and now enables us to flourish in the strength of manhood. Look back, my friends, to those who started along with yourselves in the race of life. Think how many of them have fallen around you. Observe how many blank spaces you can number in the catalogue of those who were once your companions. If, in the midst of so much devastation, you have been preserved and blessed; consider seriously what returns you owe to the goodness of Heaven. Inquire whether your conduct has corresponded to these obligations; whether, in public and in private, you have honoured, as became you, the God of your fathers; and whether, amidst the unknown occurrences that are yet before you, you have ground to hope for the continued protection of the Almighty.

Bring to mind the various revolutions which you have beheld in human affairs, since you became actors on this busy theatre. Reflect on the changes which have taken place in men and manners, in opinions and customs, in private fortunes, and in public conduct. By the observations you have made on these, and the experience you have gained, have you improved proportionably in wisdom? Have the changes of the world which you have witnessed, loosened all unreasonable attachment to it? Have they taught you this great lesson, that, while *the fashion of the world is ever passing away*, only in God and in virtue stability is to be found? Of great use, amidst the whirl of the world, are such pauses as these in life; such resting-places of thought and reflection; whence we can calmly and deliberately look back on the past, and anticipate the future.

To the future, we are often casting an eager eye, and fondly storing it, in our imagination, with many a pleasing scene. But if we would look to it, like wise men, let it be under the persuasion that it is nearly to resemble the past, in bringing forward a mixture of alternate hopes and fears, of griefs and joys. In order to be prepared for whatever it may bring, let us cultivate that manly fortitude of mind, which, supported by a pious trust in God, will enable us to encounter properly the vicissitudes of our state. No quality is more necessary than this, to them who are passing through that stormy season of life of which we now treat. Softness and effeminacy let them leave to the young and unexperienced, who are amusing themselves with florid prospects of bliss. But to those who are now engaged in the middle of their course, who are supposed to be well acquainted with the world, and to know that they have to struggle in it with various hardships; firmness, vigour, and resolution, are dispositions more suitable. They must buckle on well this armour of the mind, if they would issue forth into the contest with any prospect of success. — While we thus study to correct the errors, and to provide against the dangers, which are peculiar to this stage of life, let us also, —

V. Lay foundation for comfort in old age. That is a period

which all expect and hope to see; and to which, amidst the toils of the world, men sometimes look forward, not without satisfaction, as to the period of retreat and rest. But let them not deceive themselves. A joyless and dreary season it will prove, if they arrive at it with an unimproved, or corrupted mind. For old age, as for every other thing, a certain preparation is requisite; and that preparation consists chiefly in three particulars; in the acquisition of knowledge, of friends, of virtue. There is an acquisition of another kind, of which it is altogether needless for me to give any recommendation, that of riches. But though this, by many, will be esteemed a more material acquisition than all the three I have named, it may be confidently pronounced, that without these other requisites, all the wealth we can lay up in store will prove insufficient for making our latter days pass smoothly away.

First, He who wishes to render his old age comfortable, should study betimes to enlarge and improve his mind; and by thought and inquiry, by reading and reflecting, to acquire a taste for useful knowledge. This will provide for him a great and noble entertainment, when other entertainments leave him. If he bring into the solitary retreat of age, a vacant, uninformed mind, where no knowledge dawns, where no ideas rise, which has nothing to feed upon within itself, many a heavy and comfortless day he must necessarily pass. — Next, When a man declines into the vale of years, he depends more on the aid of his friends, than in any other period of his life. Then is the time, when he would especially wish to find himself surrounded by some who love and respect him; who will bear with his infirmities, relieve him of his labours, and cheer him with their society. Let him, therefore, now in the summer of his days, while yet active and flourishing, by acts of seasonable kindness and beneficence, ensure that love, and by upright and honourable conduct lay foundation for that respect, which in old age he would wish to enjoy. — In the last place, Let him consider a good conscience, peace with God, and the hope of heaven, as the most effectual consolations he can possess, when the *evil days shall come*, wherein, otherwise, he is likely to find little pleasure. It is not merely by transient acts of devotion that such consolations are to be provided. The regular tenour of a virtuous and pious life, spent in the faithful discharge of all the duties of our station, will prove the best preparation for old age, for death, and for immortality.

Among the measures thus taken for the latter scenes of life, let me admonish every one not to forget to put his worldly affairs in order in due time. This is a duty which he owes to his character, to his family, or to those, whoever they be, that are to succeed him; but a duty too often unwisely delayed, from a childish aversion to entertain any thoughts of quitting the world. Let him not trust much to what he will do in his old age. Sufficient for that day, if he shall live to see it, will be the burden thereof. It has been remarked, that as men advance in years, they care less to think of death. Perhaps it occurs oftener to the thoughts of the young, than of the old. Feebleness of spirit renders melancholy ideas more oppressive; and after

having been so long accustomed and inured to the world, men bear worse with any thing which reminds them that they must soon part with it.—However, as to part with it is the doom of all, let us take measures betimes for going off the stage, when it shall be our turn to withdraw, with decency and propriety; leaving nothing unfulfilled which it is expedient to have done before we die. To live long, ought not to be our favourite wish, so much as to live well. By continuing too long on earth, we might only live to witness a great number of melancholy scenes, and to expose ourselves to a wider compass of human woe. He who has served his generation faithfully in the world, has duly honoured God, and been beneficent and useful to mankind; he who in his life has been respected and beloved; whose death is accompanied with the sincere regret of all who knew him, and whose memory is honoured; that man has sufficiently fulfilled his course, whether it was appointed by Providence to be long or short. *For honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that which is measured by number of years; but wisdom is the grey hair to man; and an unspotted life is old age.**

SERMON XXXV.

ON DEATH.

ECCLESIASTES, xii. 5.

— *Man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.*

THIS is a sight which incessantly presents itself. Our eyes are so much accustomed to it, that it hardly makes any impression. Throughout every season of the year, and during the course of almost every day, the funerals which pass along the streets show us *man going to his long home*. Were death a rare and uncommon object; were it only once in the course of a man's life, that he beheld one of his fellow-creatures carried to the grave, a solemn awe would fill him; he would stop short in the midst of his pleasures; he would even be chilled with secret horror. Such impressions, however, would prove unsuitable to the nature of our present state. When they became so strong as to render men unfit for the ordinary business of life, they would in a great measure defeat the intention of our being placed in this world. It is better ordered by the wisdom of Providence, that they should be weakened by the frequency of their recurrence; and so tempered by the mixture of other passions, as to allow us to go on freely in acting our parts on earth.

Yet, familiar as death is now become, it is undoubtedly fit, that by an event of so important a nature, some impression should be made upon our minds. It ought not to pass over, as one of those common incidents which are beheld without concern, and awaken no reflection.

* Wisdom, iv. 8, 9.

There are many things which the funerals of our fellow-creatures are calculated to teach; and happy it were for the gay and dissipated, if they would listen more frequently to the instructions of so awful a monitor. In the context, the wise man had described, under a variety of images suited to the eastern style, the growing infirmities of old age, until they arrive at that period which concludes them all; when, as he beautifully expresses it, *the silver cord being loosed, and the golden bowl broken, the pitcher being broken at the fountain, and the wheel at the cistern, man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets.* In discoursing from these words, it is not my purpose to treat, at present, of the instructions to be drawn from the prospect of our own death. I am to confine myself to the death of others; to consider death as one of the most frequent and considerable events that happen in the course of human affairs; and to show in what manner we ought to be affected, first, by the death of strangers, or indifferent persons; secondly, by the death of friends; and thirdly, by the death of enemies.

I. By the death of indifferent persons; if any can be called indifferent to whom we are so nearly allied as brethren by nature, and brethren in mortality. When we observe the funerals that pass along the streets, or when we walk along the monuments of death, the first thing that naturally strikes us, is the undistinguishing blow, with which that common enemy levels all. We behold a great promiscuous multitude all carried to the same abode; all lodged in the same dark and silent mansions. There, mingle persons of every age and character, of every rank and condition in life; the young and the old, the poor and the rich, the gay and the grave, the renowned and the ignoble. A few weeks ago, most of those whom we have seen carried to the grave walked about as we do now on the earth; enjoyed their friends, beheld the light of the sun, and were forming designs for future days. Perhaps, it is not long since they were engaged in scenes of high festivity. For them, perhaps, the cheerful company assembled; and in the midst of the circle they shone with gay and pleasing vivacity. But now—to them, all is finally closed. To them, no more shall the seasons return, or the sun rise. No more shall they hear the voice of mirth, or behold the face of man. They are swept from the universe, as though they had never been. They are *carried away as with a flood; the wind has passed over them, and they are gone.*

When we contemplate this desolation of the human race; this final termination of so many hopes; this silence that now reigns among those who, a little while ago, were so busy or so gay; who can avoid being touched with sensations at once awful and tender? What heart but then warms with the glow of humanity? In whose eye does not the tear gather, on revolving the fate of passing and short-lived man? Such sensations are so congenial to human nature, that they are attended with a certain kind of sorrowful pleasure. Even voluptuaries themselves sometimes indulge a taste for funeral melancholy. After the festive assembly is dismissed, they choose to walk retired in the shady grove, and to contemplate the venerable

sepulchres of their ancestors. This melancholy pleasure arises from two different sentiments meeting at the same time in the breast; a sympathetic sense of the shortness and vanity of life, and a persuasion that something exists after death; sentiments which unite at the view of *the house appointed for all living*. A tomb, it has been justly said, is a monument situated on the confines of both worlds. It, at once, presents to us the termination of the inquietudes of life, and sets before us the image of eternal rest. *There, in the elegant expressions of Job, the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are there; and the servant is free from his master.* It is very remarkable, that, in all languages, and among all nations, death has been described in a style of this kind; expressed by figures of speech, which convey every where the same idea of rest, or sleep, or retreat from the evils of life. Such a style perfectly agrees with the general belief of the soul's immortality; but assuredly conveys no high idea of the boasted pleasures of the world. It shows how much all mankind have felt this life to be a scene of trouble and care; and have agreed in opinion, that perfect rest is to be expected only in the grave.

There, says Job, are the small and the great. There, the poor man lays down at last the burden of his wearisome life. No more shall he groan under the load of poverty and toil. No more shall he hear the insolent calls of the master, from whom he received his scanty wages. No more shall he be raised from needful slumber on his bed of straw, nor be hurried away from his homely meal, to undergo the repeated labours of the day. While his humble grave is preparing, and a few poor and decayed neighbours are carrying him thither, it is good for us to think that this man too was our brother; that for him the aged and destitute wife, and the needy children, now weep; that, neglected as he was by the world, he possessed perhaps both a sound understanding and a worthy heart; and is now carried by angels to rest in Abraham's bosom.—At no great distance from him, the grave is opened to receive the rich and proud man. For, as it is said with emphasis in the parable, *the rich man also died, and was buried.** He also died. His riches prevented not his sharing the same fate with the poor man; perhaps, through luxury, they accelerated his doom. Then, indeed, *the mourners go about the street;* and while, in all the pomp and magnificence of woe, his funeral is prepared, his heirs, in the mean time, impatient to examine his will, are looking on one another with jealous eyes, and already beginning to quarrel about the division of his substance.—One day, we see carried along the coffin of the smiling infant; the flower just nipped as it began to blossom in the parents' view; and the next day, we behold a young man, or young woman, of blooming form and promising hopes, laid in an untimely grave. While the funeral is attended by a numerous, unconcerned company, who are discoursing to one another about the news of the day, or the ordinary affairs of life, yet our thoughts rather follow to the house of mourning, and

* Luke, xvi. 22.

represent to themselves what is going on there. There, we should see a disconsolate family, sitting in silent grief, thinking of the sad breach that is made in their little society; and, with tears in their eyes, looking to the chamber that is now left vacant, and to every memorial that presents itself of their departed friend. By such attention to the woes of others, the selfish hardness of our hearts will be gradually softened, and melted down into humanity.

Another day, we follow to the grave one who, in old age, and after a long career of life, has, in full maturity, sunk at last into rest. As we are going along to the mansion of the dead, it is natural for us to think, and to discourse, of all the changes which such a person has seen during the course of his life. He has passed, it is likely, through varieties of fortune. He has experienced prosperity and adversity. He has seen families and kindreds rise and fall. He has seen peace and war succeeding in their turns; the face of his country undergoing many alterations; and the very city in which he dwelt, rising, in a manner, new around him. After all he has beheld, his eyes are now closed for ever. He was becoming a stranger in the midst of a new succession of men. A race who knew him not, had arisen to fill the earth. Thus passes the world away. Throughout all ranks and conditions, *one generation passeth, and another generation cometh*; and this great inn is by turns evacuated, and replenished by troops of succeeding pilgrims. — O vain and inconstant world! O fleeting and transient life! When will the sons of men learn to think of thee as they ought? When will they learn humanity, from the afflictions of their brethren; or moderation and wisdom, from the sense of their own fugitive state? — But now to come nearer to ourselves, let us,

II. CONSIDER the death of our friends. Want of reflection, or the long habits either of a very busy, or a very dissipated life, may have rendered men insensible to all such objects as I have now described. The stranger, and the unknown, fall utterly unnoticed at their side. Life proceeds with them in its usual train, without being affected by events in which they take no personal concern. But the dissolution of those ties, which had long bound men together in intimate and familiar union, gives a painful shock to every heart. When a family, who, for years, had been living in comfort and peace, are suddenly shattered by some of their most beloved or respected members being torn from them; when the husband or the spouse are separated for ever from the companion, who, amidst every vicissitude of fortune, solaced their life; who had shared all their joys, and participated in all their sorrows; when the weeping parent is folding in his arms the dying child whom he tenderly loved; when he is giving his last blessing, receiving the last fond adieu, looking for the last time on that countenance, now wasting and faded, which he had once beheld with much delight; then is the time, when the heart is made to drink all the bitterness of human woe. — But I seek not to wound your feelings by dwelling on these sad descriptions. Let us rather turn our thoughts to the manner in which such

events ought to be received and improved, since happen they must in the life of man.

Then, indeed, is the time to weep. Let not a false idea of fortitude, or mistaken conceptions of religious duty, be employed to restrain the bursting emotion. Let the heart seek its relief, in the free effusion of just and natural sorrow. It is becoming in every one to show, on such occasions, that he feels as a man ought to feel. At the same time, let moderation temper the grief of a good man and a Christian. He must not *sorrow like those who have no hope*. As high elation of spirits befits not the joys, so continued and overwhelming dejection suits not the grief of this transitory world. Grief, when it goes beyond certain bounds, becomes unmanly; when it lasts beyond a certain time, becomes unseasonable. Let him not reject the alleviation which time brings to all the wounds of the heart, but suffer excessive grief to subside, by degrees, into a tender and affectionate remembrance. Let him consider, that it is in the power of Providence to raise him up other comforts in the place of those he has lost. Or, if his mind, at present, reject the thoughts of such consolation, let it turn for relief to the prospect of a future meeting in a happier world. This is, indeed, the chief soother of affliction; the most powerful balm of the bleeding heart. It assists us to view death as no more than a temporary separation from friends. They whom we have loved still live, though not present to us. They are only removed into a different mansion in the house of the common Father. The toils of their pilgrimage are finished; and they are gone to the land of rest and peace. They are gone from this dark and troubled world, to join the great assembly of the just; and to dwell in the midst of everlasting light. In due time, we hope to be associated with them in these blissful habitations. Until this season of re-union arrive, no principle of religion discourages our holding correspondence of affection with them by means of faith and hope.

Meanwhile, let us respect the virtues, and cherish the memory of the deceased. Let their little failings be now forgotten. Let us dwell on what was amiable in their character, imitate their worth, and trace their steps. By this means, the remembrance of those whom we loved shall become useful and improving to us, as well as sacred and dear; if we accustom ourselves to consider them as still speaking, and exhorting us to all that is good; if, in situations where our virtue is tried, we call up their respected idea to view, and, as placed in their presence, think of the part which we could act before them without a blush.

Moreover, let the remembrance of the friends whom we have lost, strengthen our affection to those that remain. The narrower the circle becomes of those we love, let us draw the closer together. Let the heart that has been softened by sorrow, mellow into gentleness and kindness; make liberal allowance for the weaknesses of others; and divest itself of the little prejudices that may have formerly prepossessed it against them. The greater havoc that death has made among our friends on earth, let us cultivate connexion

more with God, and heaven, and virtue. Let those noble views which man's immortal character affords, fill and exalt our minds. Passengers only through this sublunary region, let our thoughts often ascend to that divine country, which we are taught to consider as the native seat of the soul. There we form connexions that are never broken. There we meet with friends who never die. Among celestial things there is firm and lasting constancy, while all that is on earth changes and passes away. — Such are some of the fruits we should reap from the tender feelings excited by the death of friends. But they are not only our friends who die. Our enemies also must go to their *long home*. Let us, therefore,

III. CONSIDER how we ought to be affected, when they from whom suspicions have alienated, or rivalry has divided us; they with whom we have long contended, or by whom we imagine ourselves to have suffered wrong, are laid, or about to be laid, in the grave. How inconsiderable then appear those broils in which we have been long involved, those contests and feuds which we thought were to last for ever? The awful moment that now terminates them, makes us feel their vanity. If there be a spark of humanity left in the breast, the remembrance of our common fate then awakens it. Is there a man who, if he were admitted to stand by the death-bed of his bitterest enemy, and beheld him enduring that conflict which human nature must suffer at the last, would not be inclined to stretch forth the hand of friendship, to utter the voice of forgiveness, and to wish for perfect reconciliation with him before he left the world? Who is there that when he beholds the remains of his adversary deposited in the dust, feels not, in that moment, some relents at the remembrance of those past animosities which mutually embittered their life? — “There lies the man with whom I contended so long, silent and mute for ever. He is fallen, and I am about to follow him. How poor is the advantage which I now enjoy? Where are the fruits of all our contests? In a short time we shall be laid together; and no remembrance remain of either of us under the sun. How many mistakes may there have been between us? Had not he his virtues and good qualities as well as I? When we both shall appear before the judgment-seat of God, shall I be found innocent and free of blame, for all the enmity I have borne to him?” — My friends, let the anticipation of such sentiments serve now to correct the inveteracy of prejudice, to cool the heat of anger, to allay the fierceness of resentment. How unnatural is it for animosities so lasting to possess the hearts of mortal men, that nothing can extinguish them but the cold hand of death? Is there not a sufficient proportion of evils in the short span of human life, that we seek to increase their number, by rushing into unnecessary contests with one another? When a few suns more have rolled over our heads, friends and foes shall have retreated together; and their love and their hatred be equally buried. Let our few days, then, be spent in peace. While we are all journeying onwards to death, let us rather *bear one another's burdens*, than harass one another by the way. Let us smooth and cheer the road as much as we can, rather than fill the

valley of our pilgrimage with the hateful monuments of our contention and strife.

Thus I have set before you some of those meditations which are naturally suggested by the prevalence of death around us, by the death of strangers, of friends, and of enemies. Because topics of this nature are obvious, let it not be thought that they are without use. They require to be recalled, repeated, and enforced. Moral and religious instruction derives its efficacy, not so much from what men are taught to know, as from what they are brought to feel. It is not the dormant knowledge of any truths, but the vivid impression of them, which has influence on practice. Neither let it be thought that such meditations are unseasonable intrusions upon those who are living in health, in affluence, and ease. There is no hazard of their making too deep or painful an impression. The gloom which they occasion is transient; and will soon, too soon, it is probable, be dispelled by the succeeding affairs and pleasures of the world. To wisdom it certainly belongs, that men should be impressed with just views of their nature and their state; and the pleasures of life will always be enjoyed to most advantage when they are tempered with serious thought. *There is a time to mourn, as well as a time to rejoice. There is a virtuous sorrow, which is better than laughter. There is a sadness of the countenance, by which the heart is made better.*

SERMON XXXVI.

ON THE PROGRESS OF VICE.

1 COR. xv. 33.

Be not deceived: Evil communications corrupt good manners.

THOUGH human nature be now fallen from its original honour, several good principles still remain in the hearts of men. There are few, if any, on whose minds the reverence for a Supreme Being continues not, in some degree, impressed. In every breast, some benevolent affections are found, and conscience still retains a sense of the distinction between moral good and evil. These principles of virtue are always susceptible of improvement; and, in favourable situations, might have a happy influence on practice. But such is the frailty of our nature, and so numerous are the temptations to evil, that they are in perpetual hazard of being either totally effaced, or so far weakened as to produce no effect on conduct. They are good seeds originally sown in the heart; but which require culture, in order to make them rise to any maturity. If left without assistance, they are likely to be stifled by that profusion of noxious weeds which the soil sends forth around them.

Among the numerous causes which introduce corruption into the heart, and acculate its growth, none is more unhappily powerful than that which is pointed out in the Text, under the description of

evil communications; that is, the contagion which is diffused by bad examples, and heightened by particular connexions with persons of loose principles, or dissolute morals. This, in a licentious state of society, is the most common source of those vices and disorders which so much abound in great cities; and often proves, in a particular manner, fatal to the young; even to them whose beginnings were once auspicious and promising. It may therefore be an useful employment of attention, to trace the progress of this principle of corruption; to examine the means by which *evil communications* gradually undermine, and at last destroy, *good manners*, or (which here is the proper signification of the original word) *good morals*. It is indeed disagreeable to contemplate human nature, in this downward course of its progress. But it is always profitable to know our own infirmities and dangers. The consideration of them will lead me to suggest some of the means proper to be used, for preventing the mischiefs arising from *evil communications*.

AGREEABLY to what I observed of certain virtuous principles being inherent in human nature, there are few but who set out at first in the world with good dispositions. The warmth which belongs to youth naturally exerts itself in generous feelings, and sentiments of honour; in strong attachments to friends, and the other emotions of a kind and tender heart. Almost all the plans with which persons who have been liberally educated begin the world, are connected with honourable views. At that period they repudiate whatever is mean or base. It is pleasing to them to think of commanding the esteem of those among whom they live, and of acquiring a name among men. But, alas! how soon does this flattering prospect begin to be overcast! Desires of pleasure usher in temptation, and forward the growth of disorderly passions. Ministers of vice are seldom wanting to encourage, and flatter the passions of the young. Inferiours study to creep into favour, by servile obsequiousness to all their desires and humours. Glad to find any apology for the indulgences of which they are fond, the young too readily listen to the voice of those who suggest to them, that strict notions of religion, order, and virtue, are old-fashioned and illiberal; that the restraints which they impose are only fit to be prescribed to those who are in the first stage of pupillage; or to be preached to the vulgar, who ought to be kept within the closest bounds of regularity and subjection. But the goodness of their hearts, it is insinuated to them, and the liberality of their views, will fully justify their emancipating themselves, in some degree, from the rigid discipline of parents and teachers.

Soothing as such insinuations are to the youthful and inconsiderate, their first steps, however, in vice, are cautious and timid, and occasionally checked by remorse. As they begin to mingle more in the world, and emerge into the circles of gaiety and pleasure, finding these loose ideas countenanced by too general practice, they gradually become bolder in the liberties they take. If they had been bred to business, they begin to tire of industry, and look with contempt on the plodding race of citizens. If they be of superiour rank, they think it becomes them to resemble their equals; to assume that free-

dom of behaviour, that air of forwardness, that tone of dissipation, that easy negligence of those with whom they converse, which appear fashionable in high life. If affluence of fortune unhappily concur to favour their inclinations, amusements and diversions succeed in a perpetual round; night and day are confounded; gaming fills up their vacant intervals; they live wholly in public places; they run into many degrees of excess, disagreeable even to themselves, merely from weak complaisance, and the fear of being ridiculed by their loose associates. Among these associates, the most hardened and determined always take the lead. The rest follow them with implicit submission; and make proficiency in the school of iniquity, in exact proportion to the weakness of their understandings, and the strength of their passions.

How many pass away, after this manner, some of the most valuable years of their life, tost in a whirlpool of what cannot be called pleasure, so much as mere giddiness and folly? In the habits of perpetual connexion with idle or licentious company, all reflection is lost; while circulated from one empty head, and one thoughtless heart, to another, folly shoots up into all its most ridiculous forms. prompts the extravagant unmeaning frolic in private; or sallies forth in public into mad riot; impelled sometimes by intoxication, sometimes by mere levity of spirits.

All the while, amidst this whole course of juvenile infatuation, I readily admit, that much good-nature may still remain. Generosity and attachments may be found; nay, some awe of religion may still subsist, and some remains of those good impressions which were made upon the mind in early days. It might yet be very possible to reclaim such persons, and to form them for useful and respectable stations in the world, if virtuous and improving society should happily succeed to the place of that idle crew with whom they now associate; if important business should occur, to bring them into a different sphere of action; or if some reasonable stroke of affliction should in mercy be sent, to recal them to themselves, and to awaken serious and manly thought. But, if youth, and vigour, and flowing fortune, continue; if a similar succession of companions go on to amuse them, to engross their time, and to stir up their passions; the day of ruin,—let them take heed and beware!—the day of irrecoverable ruin begins to draw nigh. Fortune is squandered; health is broken; friends are offended, affronted, estranged; aged parents, perhaps, sent afflicted and mourning to the dust.

There are certain degrees of vice which are chiefly stamped with the character of the ridiculous, and the contemptible; and there are also certain limits, beyond which if it pass, it becomes odious and execrable. If, to other corruptions which the heart has already received, be added the infusion of sceptical principles, that worst of all the *evil communications* of sinners, the whole of morals is then on the point of being overthrown. For, every crime can then be palliated to conscience; every check and restraint which had hitherto remained, is taken away. He who, in the beginning of his course, soothed himself with the thought, that while he indulged his desires, he did hurt to no

man; now pressed by the necessity of supplying those wants into which his expensive pleasures have brought him, goes on without remorse to defraud and to oppress. The lover of pleasure now becomes hardened and cruel; violates his trust, or betrays his friend; becomes a man of treachery, or a man of blood; satisfying, or at least endeavouring all the while to satisfy himself, that circumstances from his excuse; that by necessity he is impelled; and that, in gratifying the passions which nature had implanted within him, he does no more than follow nature.

Miserable and deluded man! to what art thou come at the last? Dost thou pretend to follow nature, when thou art contemning the laws of the God of nature? when thou art stifling his voice within thee, which remonstrates against thy crimes? when thou art violating the best part of thy nature, by counteracting the dictates of justice and humanity? Dost thou follow nature, when thou renderest thyself an useless animal on the earth; and not useless only, but noxious to the society to which thou belongest, and to which thou art a disgrace; noxious, by the bad example thou hast set; noxious, by the crimes thou hast committed; sacrificing innocence to thy guilty pleasures, and introducing shame and ruin into the habitations of peace; defrauding of their due the unsuspecting who have trusted thee; involving in the ruins of thy fortune many a worthy family; reducing the industrious and the aged to misery and want; by all which, if thou hast escaped the deserved sword of justice, thou hast at least brought on thyself the resentment, and the reproach, of all the respectable and the worthy? — Tremble then at the view of the gulph which is opening before thee. Look with horreur at the precipice, on the brink of which thou standest; and if yet a moment be left for retreat, think how thou mayest escape, and be saved.

This brings me to what I proposed as the next head of discourse; to suggest some means that may be used for stopping in time the progress of such mischiefs; to point out some remedies against the fatal infection of *evil communications*.

THE first and most obvious is, to withdraw from all associations with bad men, with persons either of licentious principles, or of disorderly conduct. I have shown to what issue such dangerous connexions are apt to bring men at last. Nothing, therefore, is of more importance for the young, to whom I now chiefly address myself, than to be careful in the choice of their friends and companions. This choice is too frequently made without much thought, or is determined by some casual connexion; and yet, very often, the whole fate of their future life depends upon it. The circumstances which chiefly attract the liking and the friendship of youth, are, vivacity, good humour, engaging manners, and a cheerful or easy temper; qualities, I confess, amiable in themselves, and useful and valuable in their place. But I intreat you to remember, that these are not all the qualities requisite to form an intimate companion or friend. Something more is still to be looked for; a sound understanding, a steady mind, a firm attachment to principle, to virtue, and honour. As only solid bodies polish well, it is only on the substantial ground of these

manly endowments, that the other amiable qualities can receive their proper lustre. Destitute of these essential requisites, they shine with no more than a tinsel brilliancy. It may sparkle for a little, amidst a few circles of the frivolous and superficial; but it imposes not on the discernment of the public. The world in general seldom, after a short trial, judges amiss of the characters of men. You may be assured, that its character of you will be formed by the company you frequent; and, how agreeable soever they may seem to be, if nothing is to be found among them but hollow qualities, and external accomplishments, they soon fall down into the class, at best, of the insignificant, perhaps of the worthless; and you sink, of course, in the opinion of the public, into the same despicable rank.

Allow me to warn you, that the most gay and pleasing are sometimes the most insidious and dangerous companions; an admonition which respects both the sexes. Often they attach themselves to you from interested motives; and if any taint or suspicion lie on their character, under the cover of your rank, your fortune, or your good reputation, they seek protection for themselves. Look round you, then, with attentive eye, and weigh characters well, before you connect yourselves too closely with any who court your society. *He that walketh with wise men shall be wise; but a companion of fools shall be destroyed.* Wherefore, *enter not thou into the council of the scorner. Walk not in the way with evil men; avoid it; pass not by it; turn from it, and pass away.**

IN order to prevent the influence of *evil communications*, it is further needful, that you fix to yourselves certain principles of conduct, and to be resolved and determined on no occasion to swerve from them. Setting the consideration of religion and virtue aside, and attending merely to interest and reputation, it will be found, that he who enters on active life without having ascertained some regular plan, according to which he is to guide himself, will be unprosperous in the whole of his subsequent progress. But when conduct is viewed in a moral and religious light, the effect of having fixed no principles of action, of having formed no laudable standard of character, becomes more obviously fatal. For hence it is, that the young and thoughtless imbibe so readily the poison of *evil communications*, and fall a prey to every seducer. They have no internal guide whom they are accustomed to follow and obey; nothing within themselves that can give firmness to their conduct. They are of course the victims of momentary inclination or caprice; religious and good by starts, when, during the absence of temptation and tempters, the virtuous principle stirs within them; but never long the same; changing and fluctuating according to the passion that chances to rise, or the instigation of those with whom they have connected themselves. They are sailing on a dangerous sea, which abounds with rocks; without compass, by which to direct their course; or helm, by which to guide the vessel. Whereas, if they acted on a system, if their behaviour made it appear that they were determined to conduct themselves by certain rules and principles, not only would they escape innumerable dangers, but

* Proverbs, xiii. 20. — iv. 14, 15.

they would command respect from the licentious themselves. Evil doers would cease to lay their snares for one whom they saw moving above them, in a higher sphere, and with a more steady course.

As a farther corrective of *evil communications*, and as a foundation to those principles which you lay down for conduct, let me advise you sometimes to think, seriously, of what constitutes real enjoyment and happiness. Your days cannot be entirely spent in company and pleasure. How closely soever you are surrounded and besieged by evil companions, there must be some intervals, in which you are left by yourselves; when, after all the turbulence of amusement is over, your mind will naturally assume a graver and more pensive cast. These are precious intervals to you, if you knew their value. Seize that sober hour of retirement and silence. Indulge the meditations which then begin to rise. Cast your eye backwards on what is past of your life; look forward to what is probably to come. Think of the part you are now acting; and of what remains to be acted, perhaps to be suffered, before you die. Then is the time to form your plans of happiness, not merely for the next day, but for the general course of your life. Remember, that what is pleasing to you at twenty, will not be equally so at forty or fifty years of age; and that what continues longest pleasing, is always most valuable. Recollect your own feelings in different scenes of life. Inquire on what occasions you have felt the truest satisfaction; whether days of sobriety and a rational employment have not left behind them a more agreeable remembrance, than nights of licentiousness and riot. Look round you on the world; reflect on the different societies which have fallen under your observation; and think who among them appear to enjoy life to most advantage; whether they who, encircled by gay companions, are constantly fatiguing themselves in quest of pleasure; or they to whom pleasure comes unsought, in the course of an active, virtuous, and manly life. Compare together these two classes of mankind, and ask your own hearts, to which of them you would choose to belong. If, in a happy moment, the light of truth begin to break in upon you, refuse not admittance to the ray. If your hearts secretly reproach you for the wrong choice you have made, bethink yourselves that the evil is not irreparable. Still there is time for repentance and retreat; and a return to wisdom is always honourable.

Were such meditations often indulged, the *evil communications* of sinners would die away before them; the force of their poison would evaporate; the world would begin to assume in your eyes a new form and shape. Disdain not, in these solitary hours, to recollect what the wisest have said, and have written, concerning human happiness, and human vanity. Treat not their opinions, as effusions merely of peevishness or disappointment; but believe them to be, what they truly are, the result of long experience, and thorough acquaintance with the world. Consider that the season of youth is passing fast away. It is time for you to be taking measures for an establishment in life; nay, it were wise to be looking forward to a placid enjoyment of old age. That is a period you wish to see; but how miser-

able, when it arrives, if it yield you nothing but the dregs of life; and present no retrospect, except that of a thoughtless and dishonoured youth.

LET me once more advise you, to look forward sometimes beyond old age; to look to a future world. Amidst *evil communications*, let your belief, and your character as Christians arise to your view. Think of the sacred name in which you were baptized. Think of the God whom your fathers honoured and worshipped; of the religion in which they trained you up; of the venerable rites in which they brought you to partake. Their paternal cares have now ceased. They have finished their earthly course; and the time is coming when you must follow them. You know that you are not to live always here; and you surely do not believe that your existence is to end with this life. Into what world, then, are you next to go? Whom will you meet with there? Before whose tribunal are you to appear? What account will you be able to give of your present trifling and irregular conduct to Him who made you? — Such thoughts may be treated as unseasonable intrusions. But intrude they sometimes will, whether you make them welcome or not. Better, men, to allow them free reception when they come, and to consider fairly to what they lead. You have seen persons die; at least, you have heard of your friends dying near you. Did it never enter into your minds, to think what their last reflections provably were in their concluding moments; or what your own, in such a situation, would be? What would be then your hopes and fears; what part you would then wish to have acted; in what light your closing eyes would then view this life, and this world.

These are thoughts, my friends, too important to be always excluded. These are things too solemn and awful to be trifled with. They are superiour to all the ridicule of fools. They come home to every man's bosom; and are entitled to every man's highest attention. Let us regard them as becomes reasonable and mortal creatures; and they will prove effectual antidotes to the *evil communications* of petulant scoffers. When vice or folly arise to tempt us under flattering forms, let the serious character which we bear as men come also forward to view; and let the solemn admonitions, with which I conclude, sound full in our ears: *My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not. Come out from amongst them, and be separate. Remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Fear the Lord, and depart from evil. The way of life is above to the wise*; and he that keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul.*

* Prov. i. 10. 2 Cor. vi. 17. Eccles. xii. 1. Prov. xv. 24.

SERMON XXXVII.

ON FORTITUDE.

PSALM XXVII. 3.

Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear.

THIS world is a region of danger, in which perfect safety is possessed by no man. Though we live in times of established tranquillity, when there is no ground to apprehend that *an host* shall, in the literal sense, *encamp against us*; yet every man, from one quarter or other, has somewhat to dread. *Riches often make to themselves wings, and flee away.* The firmest health may in a moment be shaken. The most flourishing family may unexpectedly be scattered. The appearances of our security are frequently deceitful. When our sky seems more settled and serene, in some unobserved quarter gathers the little black cloud, in which the tempest ferments, and prepares to discharge itself on our head. Such is the real situation of man in this world; and he who flatters himself with an opposite view of his state, only lives in the paradise of fools.

In this situation, no quality is more requisite than constancy, or fortitude of mind; a quality which the Psalmist appears, from the sentiment in the Text, to have possessed in an eminent degree. Fortitude was justly classed, by the ancient philosophers, among the cardinal virtues. It is indeed essential to the support of them all; and it is most necessary to be acquired by every one who wishes to discharge with fidelity the duties of his station. It is the armour of the mind, which will fit him for encountering the trials, and surmounting the dangers, that are likely to occur in the course of his life. It may be thought, perhaps, to be a quality, in some measure, constitutional; dependent on firmness of nerves, and strength of spirits. Though, partly, it is so, yet experience shows that it may also be acquired by principle, and be fortified by reason; and it is only when thus acquired, and thus fortified, that it can be accounted to carry the character of virtue. Fortitude is opposed, as all know, to timidity, irresolution, a feeble and a wavering spirit. It is placed, like other virtues, in the middle between two extremes; standing at an equal distance from rashness on the one hand, and from pusillanimity on the other. In discoursing on this subject, I propose, first, to show the importance of fortitude or constancy; next, to ascertain the grounds on which it must rest; and lastly, to suggest some considerations for assisting the exercise of it.

I. THE high importance of fortitude will easily appear, if we consider it as respecting either the happiness of human life, or the proper discharge of its duties.

Without some degree of fortitude, there can be no happiness; because, amidst the thousand uncertainties of life, there can be no enjoyment of tranquillity. The man of feeble and timorous spirit lives under perpetual alarms. He foresees every distant danger, and

trembles. He explores the regions of possibility, to discover the dangers that may arise. Often he creates imaginary ones; always magnifies those that are real. Hence, like a person haunted by spectres, he loses the free enjoyment even of a safe and prosperous state. On the first shock of adversity, he desponds. Instead of exerting himself to lay hold on the resources that remain, he gives up all for lost; and resigns himself to abject and broken spirits. — On the other hand, firmness of mind is the parent of tranquillity. It enables one to enjoy the present without disturbance; and to look calmly on dangers that approach, or evils that threaten in future. It suggests good hopes. It supplies resources. It allows a man to retain the full possession of himself, in every situation of fortune. Look into the heart of this man, and you will find composure, cheerfulness, and magnanimity. Look into the heart of the other, and you will see nothing but confusion, anxiety, and trepidation. The one is the castle built on a rock, which defies the attacks of surrounding waters. The other is a hut placed on the shore, which every wind shakes, and every wave overflows.

If fortitude be thus essential to the enjoyment of life, it is equally so to the proper discharge of all its most important duties. He who is of a cowardly mind is, and must be, a slave to the world. He fashions his whole conduct according to its hopes and fears. He smiles, and fawns, and betrays, from abject considerations of personal safety. He is incapable of either conceiving, or executing, any great design. He can neither stand the clamour of the multitude, nor the frowns of the mighty. The wind of popular favour, or the threats of power, are sufficient to shake his most determined purpose. The world always knows where to find him. He may pretend to have principles; but on every trying occasion, it will be seen, that his pretended principles bend to convenience and safety. — The man of virtuous fortitude, again, follows the dictates of his heart, unembarrassed by those restraints which lie upon the timorous. Having once determined what is fit for him to do, no threatenings can shake, nor dangers appal him. He rests upon himself, supported by a consciousness of inward dignity. I do not say that this disposition alone will secure him against every vice. He may be lifted up with pride. He may be seduced by pleasure. He may be hurried away by passion. But at least on one quarter he will be safe; by no abject fears misled into evil.

Without this temper of mind, no man can be a thorough Christian. For his profession, as such, requires him to be superiour to that *fear of man which bringeth a snare*; enjoins him, for the sake of a good conscience, to encounter every danger; and to be prepared, if called, even to lay down his life in the cause of religion and truth. All who have been distinguished as servants of God, or benefactors of men; all who, in perilous situations, have acted their part with such honour as to render their names illustrious through succeeding ages, have been eminent for fortitude of mind. Of this we have one conspicuous example in the Apostle Paul, whom it will be instructive for us to view in a remarkable occurrence of his life. After having long

acted as the Apostle of the Gentiles, his mission called him to go to Jerusalem, where he knew that he was to encounter the utmost violence of his enemies. Just before he set sail, he called together the elders of his favourite church at Ephesus, and in a pathetic speech, which does great honour to his character, gave them his last farewell. Deeply affected by their knowledge of the certain dangers to which he was exposing himself, all the assembly were filled with distress, and melted into tears. The circumstances were such as might have conveyed dejection even into a resolute mind; and would have totally overwhelmed the feeble. *They all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him; sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more.** What were then the sentiments, what was the language of this great and good man? Hear the words which spoke his firm and undaunted mind. *Behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying, that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.†* There was uttered the voice, there breathed the spirit, of a brave and a virtuous man. Such a man knows not what it is to shrink from danger, when conscience points out his path. In that path he is determined to walk; let the consequences be what they will. *Till I die, I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go. My heart shall not reproach me so long as I live.†* “For me, there is “a part appointed to act. I go to perform it. My duty I shall do “to-day. Let to-morrow take thought for the things of itself.”— Having thus shown the importance, I proceed,

II. To show the proper foundations of constancy and fortitude of mind. They are principally two; a good conscience, and trust in God.

A corrupted and guilty man can possess no true firmness of heart. He who, by crooked paths, pursues dishonourable ends, has many things to dismay him. He not only dreads the disappointment of his designs, by some of those accidents to which all are exposed; but he has also to dread the treachery of his confederates, the discovery and reproach of the world, and the just displeasure of Heaven. His fears he is obliged to conceal; but while he assumes the appearance of intrepidity before the world, he trembles within himself; and the bold and steady eye of integrity frequently darts terror into his heart. There is, it is true, a sort of constitutional courage, which sometimes has rendered men daring in the most flagitious attempts. But this fool-hardiness of the rash, this boldness of the ruffian, is altogether different from real fortitude. It arises merely from warmth of blood, from want of thought, and blindness to danger. As it forms no character of value, so it appears only in occasional sallies; and never can be uniformly maintained. It requires adventitious props to support it; and, in some hour of trial, always fails. There

* Acts, xx. 37, 38.

† Acts, xx. 22, 23, 24.

‡ Job, xxvii. 5, 6.

can be no true courage, no regular persevering constancy, but what is connected with principle, and founded on a consciousness of rectitude of intention. This, and this only, erects that brazen wall, which we can oppose to every hostile attack. It clothes us with an armour, on which fortune will spend its shafts in vain. All is sound within. There is no weak place, where we particularly dread a blow. There is no occasion for false colours to be hung out. No disguise is needed to cover us. We would be satisfied if all mankind could look into our hearts. What has he to fear, who not only acts on a plan which his conscience approves, but who knows that every good man, nay, the whole unbiassed world, if they could trace his intentions, would justify and approve his conduct?

HE knows, at the same time, that he is acting under the immediate eye and protection of the Almighty. *Behold, my witness is in heaven; and my record is on high.** Here opens a new source of fortitude to every virtuous man. The consciousness of such an illustrious spectator, invigorates and animates him. He trusts, that the eternal Lover of righteousness not only beholds and approves, but will strengthen and assist; will not suffer him to be unjustly oppressed, and will reward his constancy in the end, with glory, honour, and immortality. A good conscience, thus supported, bestows on the heart a much greater degree of intrepidity, than it could otherwise inspire. One who rests on an almighty, though invisible, Protector, exerts his powers with double force; acts with vigour not his own. Accordingly, it was from this principle of trust in God, that the Psalmist derived that courage and boldness, which he expresses in the text. He had said immediately before, *The Lord is my light and my salvation; the Lord is the strength of my life.* The consequence which directly follows is, *Of whom shall I be afraid? Though an host should encamp against me, my heart shall not fear.* It remains,

III. THAT I suggest a few considerations which may prove auxiliary to the exercise of virtuous fortitude in the midst of dangers.

From what was just now said, it appears, first, that it is of high importance to every one, who wishes to act his part with becoming resolution, to cultivate a religious principle, and to be inspired with trust in God. The imperfections of the best are indeed so numerous, as to give them no title to claim, on their own account, the protection of Heaven. But we are taught to believe, that the merciful God, who made us, and who *knows our frame*, favours the sincere and upright; that the supreme administration of the universe is always on the side of truth and virtue; and that, therefore, every worthy character, and every just and good cause, though for a while it should be depressed, is likely to receive countenance and protection in the end. The more firmly this belief is rooted in the heart, its influence will be more powerful, in surmounting the fears which arise from a sense of our own weakness or danger. The records of all nations afford a thousand remarkable instances of the effect of this principle, both on individuals, and on bodies of men. Animated by the strong belief of a just cause, and a protecting God, the *feeble have waxed*

* Job, xvi. 19.

strong, and have despised dangers, sufferings, and death. Handfuls of men have defied *hosts that were encamped against them*; and have gone forth, conquering and to conquer. *The sword of the Lord and of Gideon* have called forth a valour which astonished the world; and which could have been exerted by none, but those who fought under a divine banner.

IN the next place, let him who would preserve fortitude in difficult situations, fill his mind with a sense of what constitutes the true honour of man. It consists not in the multitude of riches, or the elevation of rank; for experience shows, that these may be possessed by the worthless, as well as by the deserving. It consists in being deterred by no danger when duty calls us forth; in fulfilling our allotted part, whatever it may be, with faithfulness, bravery, and constancy of mind. These qualities never fail to stamp distinction on the character. They confer on him who discovers them, an honourable superiority, which all, even enemies, feel, and revere. Let every man, therefore, when the hour of danger comes, bethink himself, that now is arrived the hour of trial, the hour which must determine, whether he is to rise, or to sink for ever, in the esteem of all around him. If, when put to the test, he discover no firmness to maintain his ground, no fortitude to stand a shock, he has forfeited every pretension to a manly mind. He must reckon on being exposed to general contempt; and, what is worse, he will feel that he deserves it. In his own eyes he will be contemptible; than which, surely, no misery can be more severe.

BUT in order to acquire habits of fortitude, what is of the highest consequence is to have formed a just estimate of the goods and evils of life, and of the value of life itself. For here lies the chief source of our weakness and pusillanimity. We over-value the advantages of fortune; rank and riches, ease and safety. Deluded by vain opinions, we look to these as our ultimate goods. We hang upon them with fond attachment; and to forfeit any hope of advancement, to incur the least discredit with the world, or to be brought down but one step from the station we possess, is regarded with consternation and dismay. Hence, a thousand weights hang upon the mind, which depress its courage, and bend it to mean and dishonourable compliances. What fortitude can he possess, what worthy or generous purpose can he form, who conceives diminution of rank, or loss of fortune, to be the chief evils which man can suffer? Put these into the balance with true honour, with conscious integrity, with the esteem of the virtuous and the wise, with the favour of Almighty God, with peace of mind and hope of heaven; and then think, whether those dreaded evils are sufficient to intimidate you from doing your duty. Look beyond external appearances to the inside of things. Suffer not yourselves to be imposed on by that glittering varnish, with which the surface of the world dazzles the vulgar. Consider how many are contented and happy without those advantages of fortune, on which you put so extravagant a value. Consider whether it is possible for you to be happy with them, if, for their sake, you forfeit all that is estimable in man. The favour of

the great, perhaps, you think, is at stake; or that popularity with the multitude, on which you build plans of advancement. Alas! how precarious are the means which you employ in order to attain the end you have in view; and the end itself, how little is it worthy of your ambition? That favour which you pursue, of dubious advantage when gained, is frequently lost by servile compliance. The timid and abject are detected, and despised even by those whom they court; while the firm and resolute rise in the end to those honours, which the other pursued in vain.

Put the case at the worst. Suppose not your fortune only, but your safety, to be in hazard; your life itself to be endangered, by adhering to conscience and virtue. Think, what a creeping and ignominious state you would render life, if, when your duty calls, you would expose it to no danger; if, by a dastardly behaviour, you would, at any expence, preserve it. That life which you are so anxious to preserve, can at any rate be prolonged only for a few years more; and those years may be full of woe. He who will not risk death when conscience requires him to face it, ought to be ashamed to live. — Consider as a man and a Christian, for what purpose life was given thee by Heaven. Was it, that thou mightest pass a few years in low pleasures, and ignoble sloth; flying into every corner to hide thyself, when the least danger rises to view? No: Life was given that thou mightest come forth to act some useful and honourable part, on that theatre where thou hast been placed by Providence; mightest glorify him that made thee; and, by steady perseverance in virtue, rise in the end to an immortal state.

Son of man, Remember thine original honours! Assert the dignity of thy nature! Shake off this pusillanimous dread of death; and seek to fulfil the ends for which thou wert sent forth by thy Creator! — The sentiment of a noble mind is, *I count not my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy.* To the finishing of his course, let every one direct his eye; and let him now appreciate life according to the value it will be found to have, when summed up at the close. This is the period which brings every thing to the test. Illusions may formerly have imposed on the world; may have imposed on the man himself. But all illusion then vanishes. The real character comes forth. The estimate of happiness is fairly formed. Hence it has been justly said, that no man can be pronounced either great or happy, until his last hour come. To that last hour, what will bring such satisfaction, or add so much dignity, as the reflection, on having surmounted with firmness all the discouragements of the world, and having persevered to the end in one uniform course of fidelity and honour? We remarked before, the magnanimous behaviour of the Apostle Paul, when he had persecution and distress full in view. Hear now the sentiments of the same great man, when the time of his last suffering approached; and remark the majesty and ease with which he looked on death. *I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight. I have finished my course. I have kept the faith. Hence-*

*forth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness.** How many years of life does such a dying moment overbalance? Who would not choose in this manner to go off the stage, with such a song of triumph in his mouth, rather than prolong his existence through a wretched old age, stained with sin and shame?

ANIMATED by these considerations, let us nourish that fortitude of mind, which is so essential to a man and a Christian. Let no discouragement nor danger deter us from doing what is right. Through honour and dishonour, through good report and bad report, let us preserve fidelity to our God and our Saviour. *Though an host should encamp against us,* let us not fear to discharge our duty. God assists us in the virtuous conflict; and will crown the conqueror with eternal rewards. *Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.* *To him that overcometh,* saith our blessed Lord, *I will grant to sit with me on my throne; even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father on his throne.†*

SERMON XXXVIII.

ON ENVY.

1 COR. xiii. 4.

Charity envieth not —

ENVY is a sensation of uneasiness and disquiet, arising from the advantages which others are supposed to possess above us, accompanied with malignity towards those who possess them. This is universally admitted to be one of the blackest passions in the human heart. In this world we depend much on one another; and were therefore formed by God to be mutually useful and assisting. The instincts of kindness and compassion which belong to our frame, show how much it was the intention of our Creator that we should be united in friendship. If any infringe this great law of nature, by acts of causeless hostility, resentment may justly arise. No one is to be condemned for defending his rights, and showing displeasure against a malicious enemy. But to conceive ill-will at one who has attacked none of our rights, nor done us any injury, solely because he is more prosperous than we are, is a disposition altogether unnatural; it suits not the human constitution, and partakes more of the rancour of an evil spirit. Hence, the character of an envious man is universally odious. All disclaim it; and they who feel themselves under the influence of this passion, carefully conceal it.

But it is proper to consider, that among all our passions, both good and bad, there are many different gradations. Sometimes they swim on the surface of the mind, without producing any internal agitation. They proceed no farther than the beginnings of passion. Allayed by our constitution, or tempered by the mixture of other

* 2 Tim. iv. 6, 7, 8.

† Rev. ii. 10. — iii. 21.

dispositions, they exert no considerable influence on the temper. Though the character in which envy forms the ruling passion, and reigns in all its force, be one too odious, I hope, to be common; yet some shade, some tincture, of this evil disposition mixes with most characters in the world. It is, perhaps, one of the most prevailing infirmities to which we are subject. There are few but who, at one time or other, have found somewhat of this nature stirring within them; some lurking uneasiness in their mind, when they looked up to others, who enjoyed a greater share than had fallen to their lot, of some advantages which they wished, and thought themselves entitled, to possess. Though this should not embitter their disposition; though it should create the uneasiness only, without the malignity, of envy; yet still it is a disturbed state of mind; and always borders upon, if it actually include not, some vicious affections. In order, as far as possible, to remedy this evil, I shall now consider what are the most general grounds of the envy which men are apt to bear to others; and shall examine what foundation they afford, for any degree of this troublesome and dangerous passion.—The chief grounds of envy may be reduced to three: Accomplishments of mind; advantages of birth, rank, and fortune; superiour success in worldly pursuits.

I. ACCOMPLISHMENTS, or endowments of the mind. The chief endowment for which man deserves to be valued, is virtue. This unquestionably forms the most estimable distinction among mankind. Yet this, which may appear surprising, never forms any ground of envy. No man is envied for being more just, more generous, more patient, or forgiving, than others. This may, in part, be owing to virtue producing in every one who beholds it, that high degree of respect and love, which extinguishes envy. But, probably, it is more owing to the good opinion which every one entertains of his own moral qualities. Some virtues, or at least the seeds of them, he finds within his breast. Others, he vainly attributes to himself. Those in which he is plainly deficient, he undervalues, as either not real virtues, or virtues of very inferior rank; and rests satisfied, that, on the whole, he is as worthy and respectable as his neighbour.

The case is different, with regard to those mental abilities and powers which are ascribed to others. As long as these are exerted in a sphere of action remote from ours, and not brought into competition with talents of the same kind, to which we have pretensions, they create no jealousy. They are viewed as distant objects, in which we have not any concern. It is not until they touch our own line, and appear to rival us in what we wish to excel, that they awaken envy. Even then, envy is, properly speaking, not grounded on the talents of others. For here, too, our self-complacency brings us round; from the persuasion, that, were we thoroughly known, and full justice done to us, our abilities would be found not inferior to those of our rivals. What properly occasions envy, is the fruit of the accomplishments of others; the pre-eminence which the opinion of the world bestows, or which we dread it will bestow, on their talents above ours. Hence, distinguished superiority, in genius, learning,

eloquence, or any other of those various arts that attract the notice of the world, often become painful grounds of envy; not indeed to all indifferently, but to those who follow the same line of pursuit. Mere rivalry, inspired by emulation, would carry no reproach; were not that rivalry joined with obliquity, and a malignant spirit; did it not lead to secret detraction, and unfair methods of diminishing the reputation of others. Too frequently has such a spirit tarnished the character of those who sought to shine in the elegant arts; and who, otherwise, had a just title to fame. — Let such as are addicted to this infirmity, consider how much they degrade themselves. Superiour merit, of any kind, always rests on itself. Conscious of what it deserves, it disdains low competitions and jealousies. They who are stung with envy, especially when they allow its malignity to appear, confess a sense of their own inferiority; and, in effect, pay homage to that merit from which they endeavour to detract.

But in order to eradicate the passion, and to cure the disquiet which it creates, let such persons further consider, how inconsiderable the advantage is which their rivals have gained, by any superiority over them. They whom you envy, are themselves inferior to others who follow the same pursuits. For how few, how very few, have reached the summit of excellence, in the art or study which they cultivate? Even that degree of excellence which they have attained, how seldom is it allowed to them by the world, till after they die? Public applause is the most fluctuating and uncertain of all rewards. Admired as they may be by a circle of their friends, they have to look up to others, who stand above them in public opinion; and undergo the same mortifications which you suffer in looking up to them. Consider what labour it has cost them to arrive at that degree of eminence they have gained; and, after all their labour, how imperfect their recompence is at last. Within what narrow bounds is their fame confined? With what a number of humiliations is it mixed? To how many are they absolutely unknown? Among those who know them, how many censure and decry them? — Attending fairly to these considerations, the envious might come in the end to discern, that the fame acquired by any accomplishment of the mind, by all that skill can contrive, or genius can execute, amounts to no more than a small elevation, raises the possessor to such an inconsiderable height above the crowd, that others may, without disquiet, sit down contented with their own mediocrity.

II. ADVANTAGES of fortune, superiority in birth, rank, and riches, even qualifications of body and form, become grounds of envy. Among external advantages, those which relate to the body ought certainly, in the comparative estimation of ourselves and others, to hold the lowest place; as in the acquisition of them we can claim no merit, but must ascribe them entirely to the gift of nature. Yet envy has often showed itself here in full malignity; though a small measure of reflection might have discovered that there was little or no ground for this passion to arise. It would have proved a blessing to multitudes, to have wanted those advantages for which they are envious. How frequently, for instance, has beauty betrayed the pos-

sessors of it into many a snare, and brought upon them many a disaster? Beheld with spiteful eyes by those who are their rivals, they, in the mean time, glow with no less envy against others by whom they are surpassed; while, in the midst of their competitions, jealousies, and concealed enmities, the fading flower is easily blasted; short-lived at the best, and trifling at any rate, in comparison with the higher and more lasting beauties of the mind.

But of all the grounds of envy among men, superiority in rank and fortune is the most general. Hence the malignity which the poor commonly bear to the rich, as ingrossing to themselves all the comforts of life. Hence the evil eye, with which persons of inferior station scrutinize those who are above them in rank; and if they approach to that rank, their envy is generally strongest against such as are just one step higher than themselves. — Alas! my friends, all this envious disquietude, which agitates the world, arises from a deceitful figure which imposes upon the public view. False colours are hung out: the real state of men is not what it seems to be. The order of society requires a distinction of ranks to take place; but, in point of happiness, all men come much nearer to equality than is commonly imagined; and the circumstances, which form any material difference of happiness among them, are not of that nature which renders them grounds of envy. The poor man possesses not, it is true, some of the conveniences and pleasures of the rich; but, in return, he is free from many embarrassments to which they are subject. — By the simplicity and uniformity of his life, he is delivered from that variety of cares, which perplex those who have great affairs to manage, intricate plans to pursue, many enemies, perhaps, to encounter in the pursuit. In the tranquillity of his small habitation, and private family, he enjoys a peace which is often unknown at courts. The gratifications of nature, which are always the most satisfactory, are possessed by him to their full extent; and if he be a stranger to the refined pleasures of the wealthy, he is unacquainted also with the desire of them, and by consequence feels no want. His plain meal satisfies his appetite, with a relish, probably higher than that of the rich man, who sits down to his luxurious banquet. His sleep is more sound; his health more firm; he knows not what spleen, languor, or listlessness are. His accustomed employments or labours are not more oppressive to him, than the labour of attendance on courts and the great, the labours of dress, the fatigue of amusements, the very weight of idleness, frequently are to the rich. In the mean time, all the beauty of the face of nature, all the enjoyments of domestic society, all the gaiety and cheerfulness of an easy mind, are as open to him as to those of the highest rank. The splendour of retinue, the sound of titles, the appearances of high respect, are indeed soothing, for a short time, to the great. But, become familiar, they are soon forgotten. Custom effaces their impression. They sink into the rank of those ordinary things which daily recur, without raising any sensation of joy. — Cease, therefore, from looking up with discontent and envy to those whom birth or fortune have placed above you. Adjust the balance of happiness

fairly. When you think of the enjoyments you want, think also of the troubles from which you are free. Allow their just value to the comforts you possess; and you will find reason to rest satisfied, with a very moderate, though not an opulent and splendid, condition of fortune. Often, did you know the whole, you would be inclined to pity the state of those whom you now envy.

III. SUPERIOUR success in the course of worldly pursuits is a frequent ground of envy. Among all ranks of men, competitions arise. Wherever any favourite object is pursued in common, jealousies seldom fail to take place among those who are equally desirous of attaining it; as in that ancient instance of envy recorded of Joseph's brethren, who *hated their brother, because their father loved him more than all the rest.** "I could easily bear," says one, "that some others should be more reputable or famous, should be richer or greater than I. It is but just, that this man should enjoy the distinction to which his splendid abilities have raised him. It is natural for that man, to command the respect to which he is entitled by his birth or his rank." But when I, and another, have started in the race of life, upon equal terms, and in the same rank; that he, without any pretension to uncommon merit, should have suddenly so far outstripped me; should have engrossed all that public favour to which I am no less entitled than he; this is, what I cannot bear; my blood boils, my spirit swells with indignation, at this undeserved treatment I have suffered from the world." Complaints of this nature are often made, by them who seek to justify the envy which they bear to their more prosperous neighbours. But if such persons wish not to be thought unjust, let me desire them to inquire whether they have been altogether fair in the comparison they have made of their own merit with that of their rivals? and whether they have not themselves to blame, more than the world, for being left behind in the career of fortune? The world is not always blind, or unjust, in conferring its favours. Instances, indeed, sometimes occur, of deserving persons prevented, by a succession of cross incidents, from rising into public acceptance. But in the ordinary course of things, merit, sooner or later, receives a reward, while the greater part of men's misfortunes and disappointments can, generally, be traced to some misconduct of their own. *Wisdom bringeth to honour: the hand of the diligent maketh rich;* and, it has been said, not altogether without reason, that, of his own fortune in life, every man is the chief artificer. If Joseph was preferred by the father to all his brethren, his subsequent conduct showed how well he merited the preference.

Supposing, however, the world to have been unjust, in an uncommon degree, with regard to you, this will not vindicate malignity and envy towards a more prosperous competitor. You may accuse the world; but what reason have you to bear ill-will to him, who has only improved the favour which the world showed him? If, by means that are unfair, he has risen, and, to advance himself, has acted injuriously by you, resentment is justifiable; but, if you cannot ac-

* Gen. xxxvii. 4.

cuse him of any such improper conduct, his success alone gives no sanction to your envy. You, perhaps, preferred the enjoyment of your ease, to the stir of a busy, or to the cares of a thoughtful, life. Retired from the world, and following your favourite inclinations, you were not always attentive to seize the opportunities which offered, for doing justice to your character, and improving your situation. Ought you then to complain, if the more active and laborious have acquired what you were negligent to gain? Consider, that if you have obtained less preferment, you have possessed more indulgence and ease. Consider, moreover, that the rival to whom you look up with repining eyes, though more fortunate in the world, may perhaps, on the whole, not be more happy than you. He has all the vicissitudes of the world before him. He may have much to encounter, much to suffer, from which you are protected by the greater obscurity of your station. Every situation in life has both a bright and a dark side. Let not your attention dwell only on what is bright on the side of those you envy, and dark on your own. But, bringing into view both sides of your respective conditions, estimate fairly the sum of felicity.

THUS I have suggested several considerations, for evincing the unreasonableness of that disquietude which envy raises in our breasts; considerations, which tend at least to mitigate and allay the workings of this malignant passion, and which, in a sober mind, ought totally to extinguish it. The scope of the whole has been to promote, in every one, contentment with his own state. Many arguments of a different nature may be employed against envy; some taken from its sinful and criminal nature; some from the mischiefs to which it gives rise in the world; others, from the misery which it produces to him who nourishes this viper in his bosom. But, undoubtedly, the most efficacious arguments are such as show, that the circumstances of others, compared with our own, afford no ground for envy. The mistaken ideas which are entertained of the high importance of certain worldly advantages and distinctions, form the principal cause of our repining at our own lot, and envying that of others. To things light in themselves, our imagination has added undue weight. Did we allow reflection and wisdom to correct the prejudices which we have imbibed, and to disperse those phantoms of our own creating, the gloom which overcasts us would gradually vanish. Together with returning contentment, the sky would clear up, and every object brighten around us. It is in the sullen and dark shade of discontent, that noxious passions, like venomous animals, breed and prey upon the heart.

ENVY is a passion of so odious a nature, that not only it is concealed as much as possible from the world, but every man is glad to dissemble the appearances of it to his own heart. Hence it is apt to grow upon him unperceived. Let him who is desirous to keep his heart chaste and pure from its influence, examine himself strictly on those dispositions which he bears towards his prosperous neighbours. Does he ever view, with secret uneasiness, the merit of others rising into notice and distinction? Does he hear their praises

with unwilling ear? Does he feel an inclination to depreciate what he dares not openly blame? When obliged to commend, does his cold and awkward approbation insinuate his belief of some unknown defects in the applauded character? From such symptoms as these, he may infer that the disease of envy is forming; that the poison is beginning to spread its infection over his heart.

THE causes that nourish envy are principally two; and two which, very frequently, operate in conjunction; these are, pride and indolence. The connexion of pride with envy, is obvious and direct. The high value which the proud set on their own merit, the unreasonable claims which they form on the world, and the injustice which they suppose to be done to them by any preference given to others, are perpetual sources, first of discontent, and next of envy. When indolence is joined to pride, the disease of the mind becomes more inveterate and incurable. Pride leads men to claim more than they deserve. Indolence prevents them from obtaining what they might justly claim. Disappointments follow; and spleen, malignity, and envy, rage within them. The proud and indolent are always envious. Wrapt up in their own importance, they sit still, and repine, because others are more prosperous than they; while, with all their high opinion of themselves, they have done nothing either to deserve, or to acquire, prosperity. As, therefore, we value our virtue, or our peace, let us guard against these two evil dispositions of mind. Let us be modest in our esteem, and, by diligence and industry, study to acquire the esteem of others. So shall we shut up the avenues that lead to many a bad passion; and shall learn, *in whatsoever state we are*, therewith to be content.

FINALLY, in order to subdue envy, let us bring often into view those religious considerations which regard us particularly as Christians. Let us remember how unworthy we are in the sight of God; and how much the blessings which each of us enjoy, are beyond what we deserve. Let us nourish reverence and submission to that Divine Government, which has appointed to every one such a condition in the world as is fittest for him to possess. Let us recollect how opposite the Christian spirit is to envy; and what sacred obligations it lays upon us, to walk in love and charity towards one another. Indeed, when we reflect on the many miseries which abound in human life; on the scanty proportion of happiness which any man is here allowed to enjoy; on the small difference which the diversity of fortune makes on that scanty proportion; it is surprising that envy should ever have been a prevalent passion among men, much more that it should have prevailed among Christians. Where so much is suffered in common, little room is left for envy. There is more occasion for pity and sympathy, and inclination to assist each other. To our own good endeavours for rectifying our dispositions, let us not forget to add serious prayers to the Author of our being, that he who made the heart of man, and knows all its infirmities, would thoroughly purify our hearts from a passion so base, and so criminal, as envy. *Create in me, O God, a clean heart; and renew a right*

*spirit within me. Search me, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts. See if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.**

SERMON XXXIX.

ON IDLENESS.

MATTHEW, XX. 6.

— *Why stand ye here all the day idle?*

It is an observation which naturally occurs, and has been often made, that all the representations of the Christian life in Scripture are taken from active scenes; from carrying on a warfare, running a race, striving to enter in at a strait gate; and, as in this context, labouring in a vineyard. Hence the conclusion plainly follows, that various active duties are required of the Christian; and that sloth and indolence are inconsistent with his hope of heaven.

But it has been sometimes supposed, that industry, as far as it is matter of duty, regards our spiritual concerns and employments only; and that one might be very busy as a Christian, who was very idle as a man. Hence, among some denominations of Christians, an opinion has prevailed, that the perfection of religion was to be found in those monastic retreats where every active function of civil life was totally excluded, and the whole time of men filled up with exercises of devotion. They who hold such opinions proceed on the supposition, that religion has little or no concern with the ordinary affairs of the world; that its duties stand apart by themselves, and mingle not in the intercourse which men have with one another. The perfect Christian was imagined to live a sort of angelic life, sequestered from the business or pleasures of this contemptible state. The Gospel, on the contrary, represents the religion of Christ as intended for the benefit of human society. It assumes men as engaged in the business of active life; and directs its exhortations, accordingly, to all ranks and stations; to the magistrate and the subject, to the master and the servant, to the rich and the poor, to them that buy and them that sell, them that *use* and them that *abuse* the world. Some duties, indeed, require privacy and retreat. But the most important must be performed in the midst of the world, where we are commanded to *shine as lights, and by our good works to glorify our Father which is in heaven*. This world, as the context represents it, is God's vineyard, where each of us has a task assigned him to perform. In every station, and at every period of life, labour is required. At the third, the sixth, or the eleventh hour, we are commanded to work, if we would not incur, from the great Lord of the vineyard, this reproof, *Why stand ye here all the day idle?*—We may, I confess, be busy about many things, and yet be found negligent of the *One thing need*

* Psalm li. 10. — cxxxix. 23, 24.

ful. We may be very active, and withal very ill employed. But though a person may be industrious without being religious, I must at the same time admonish you, that no man can be idle without being sinful. This I shall endeavour to show in the sequel of the Discourse; wherein I purpose to reprove a vice which is too common among all ranks of men. Superiours admonish their inferiours, and parents tell their children, that idleness is the mother of every sin; while, in their own practice, they often set the example of what they reprobate severely in others. I shall study to show, that the idle man is, in every view, both foolish and criminal; that he neither lives to God; nor lives to the world; nor lives to himself.

I. He lives not to God. The great and wise Creator certainly does nothing in vain. A small measure of reflection might convince every one, that for some useful purpose he was sent into the world. The nature of man bears no mark of insignificance, or neglect. He is placed at the head of all things here below. He is furnished with a great preparation of faculties and powers. He is enlightened by reason with many important discoveries; even taught by revelation to consider himself as ransomed, by the death of Christ, from misery; and intended to rise, by gradual advances, to a still higher rank in the universe of God. In such a situation, thus distinguished, thus favoured and assisted by his Creator, can he hope to be forgiven, if he aim at no improvement, if he pursue no useful design, live for no other purpose but to indulge in sloth, consume the fruits of the earth, and to spend his days in a dream of vanity? Existence is a sacred trust; and he who thus misemploys and squanders it away, is treacherous to its Author.—Look around you, and you will behold the whole universe full of active powers. Action is, to speak so, the genius of nature. By motion and exertion, the system of being is preserved in vigour. By its different parts always acting in subordination one to another, the perfection of the whole is carried on. The heavenly bodies perpetually revolve. Day and night incessantly repeat their appointed course. Continual operations are going on in the earth, and in the waters. Nothing stands still. All is alive and stirring throughout the universe.—In the midst of this animated and busy scene, is man alone to remain idle in his place? Belongs it to him, to be the sole inactive and slothful being in the creation, when he has so much allotted him to do; when in so many various ways he might improve his own nature; might advance the glory of the God who made him; and contribute his part to the general good?

Hardly is there any feeling of the human heart more natural, or more universal, than that of our being accountable to God. It is, what the most profligate can never totally erase. Almost all nations have agreed in the belief, that there is to come some period when the Almighty will act as the Judge of his creatures. Presentiments of this, work in every breast. Conscience has already erected a tribunal, on which it anticipates the sentence which at that period shall be passed. Before this tribunal let us sometimes place ourselves in serious thought, and consider what account we are prepared to give of our conduct to Him who made us. “I placed you,” the great

Judge may then be supposed to say, "in a station where you had many occasions for action, and many opportunities of improvement. You were taught, and you knew, your duty. Throughout a course of years I continued your life. I surrounded you with friends to whom you might be useful. I gave you health, ease, leisure, and various advantages of situation.—Where are the fruits of those talents which you possessed? What good have you done with them, to yourselves? What good to others? How have you filled up your place, or answered your destination in the world? Produce some evidence, of your not having existed altogether in vain."—Let such as are now mere blanks in the world, and a burthen to the earth, think what answer they will give to those awful questions.

II. THE idle live not to the world, and their fellow-creatures around them, any more than they do to God. Had any man a title to stand alone, and to be independent of his fellows, he might then consider himself as at liberty to indulge in solitary ease and sloth, without being responsible to others for the manner in which he chose to live. But, on the face of the earth, there is no such person, from the king on his throne, to the beggar in his cottage. We are all connected with one another, by various relations; which create a chain of mutual dependence, reaching from the highest to the lowest station in society. The order and happiness of the world cannot be maintained, without perpetual circulation of active duties and offices, which all are called upon to perform in their turn. Superiours are no more independent of their inferiours, than these inferiours are of them. Each have demands and claims upon the other; and he, who in any situation of life refuses to act his part, and to contribute his share to the general stock of felicity, deserves to be proscribed from society, as an unworthy member. *If any man will not work, says the Apostle Paul, neither should he eat.** If he will do nothing to advance the purposes of society, he has no title to enjoy the advantages of it.

It is sometimes supposed, that industry and diligence are duties required of the poor alone, and that riches confer the privilege of being idle. This is so far from being justified by reason, how often soever it may obtain in fact, that the higher one is raised in the world, his obligation to be useful is proportionably increased. The claims upon him, from various quarters, multiply. The sphere of his active duties widens on every hand. Even supposing him exempted from exerting himself in behalf of his inferiours, supposing the relation between superiours and inferiours abolished, the relation among equals must still subsist. If there be no man, however high in rank, who stands not frequently in need of the good offices of his friends, does he think that he owes nothing to them in return? Can he fold his arms in selfish indolence, and expect to be served by others, if he will not exert himself in doing service to any?—Were there no other call to industry, but the relation in which every one stands to his own family, the remembrance of this alone should make the man of idleness blush. Pretends he to love those with whom he is connected

by the dearest ties, and yet will he not bestir himself for their guidance, their support, or their advancement in the world? How immoral, and cruel, is the part he acts, who slumbers in sensual ease, while the wants and demands of a helpless family cry aloud, but cry in vain, for his vigorous exertions? Is this a husband, is this a father, that deserves to be honoured with those sacred names? How many voices will be lifted up against him at the last day! Let such persons remember the awful words in Scripture, and tremble. It is written in the First Epistle to Timothy, the fifth chapter and eighth verse, *If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

III. THE idle man lives not to himself, with any more advantage than he lives to the world. It is indeed on a supposition entirely opposite, that persons of this character proceed. They imagine that, how deficient soever they may be in point of duty, they at least consult their own satisfaction. They leave to others the drudgery of life; and betake themselves, as they think, to the quarter of enjoyment and ease. Now, in contradiction to this, I assert, and hope to prove, that the idle man, first, shuts the door against all improvement; next, that he opens it wide to every destructive folly; and, lastly, that he excludes himself from the true enjoyment of pleasure.

FIRST, He shuts the door against improvement of every kind, whether of mind, body, or fortune. The law of our nature, the condition under which we are placed from our birth, is, that nothing good or great is to be acquired, without toil and industry. A price is appointed by Providence to be paid for every thing; and the price of improvement is labour. Industry may, indeed, be sometimes disappointed. *The race may not be always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.* But, at the same time, it is certain that, in the ordinary course of things, without strength, the battle cannot be gained; without swiftness, the race cannot be run with success. *In all labour, says the wise man, there is profit; but the soul of the sluggard desireth, and hath nothing.** If we consult either the improvement of the mind, or the health of the body, it is well known that exercise is the great instrument of promoting both. Sloth enfeebles equally the bodily and the mental powers. As in the animal system it engenders disease, so on the faculties of the soul it brings a fatal rust, which corrodes and wastes them; which, in a short time, reduces the brightest genius to the same level with the meanest understanding. The great differences which take place among men, are not owing to a distinction, that nature has made in their original powers, so much as to the superiour diligence with which some have improved these powers beyond others. To no purpose do we possess the seeds of many great abilities, if they are suffered to lie dormant within us. It is not the latent possession, but the active exertion of them, which gives them merit. Thousands whom indolence has sunk into contemptible obscurity, might have come forward to the highest distinction, if idleness had not frustrated the effect of all their powers.

Instead of going on to improvement, all things go to decline, with

* Prov. xiv. 23. — xiii. 4.

the idle man. His character falls into contempt. His fortune is consumed. Disorder, confusion, and embarrassment, mark his whole situation. Observe in what lively colours the state of his affairs is described by Solomon. *I went by the field of the slothful, and by the vineyard of the man void of understanding : And, lo ! it was all grown over with thorns, and nettles had covered the face thereof ; and the stone wall thereof was broken down. Then I saw, and considered it well : I looked upon it, and received instruction.** In the midst, too, of those distresses which idleness brings on its votaries, they must submit to innumerable mortifications, which never fail to attend their shameful conduct. They must reckon on seeing themselves condemned by the virtuous and wise, and slighted by the thriving part of mankind. They must expect to be left behind by every competitor for rank or fortune. They will be obliged to humble themselves before persons, now far their superiours in the world, whom, once, they would have disdained to acknowledge as their equals.—It is in this manner that a man lives to himself? Are these the advantages which were expected to be found in the lap of ease? The down may at first have appeared soft : But it will soon be found to cover thorns innumerable. *How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard ? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep ? Yet a little sleep, yet a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep. So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth ; and thy want, as an armed man.†*—But this is only a small part of the evils which persons of this description bring on themselves : For,

In the second place, While in this manner they shut the door against every improvement, they open it wide to the most destructive vices and follies. The human mind cannot remain always unemployed. Its passions must have some exercise. If we supply them not with proper employment, they are sure to run loose into riot and disorder. While we are unoccupied by what is good, evil is continually at hand ; and hence it is said in Scripture, that as soon as Satan found the house empty, he took possession, and filled it with evil spirits.‡ Every man who recollects his conduct, may be satisfied, that his hours of idleness have always proved the hours most dangerous to virtue. It was then that criminal desires arose ; guilty pursuits were suggested ; and designs were formed, which, in their issue, have disquieted and embittered his whole life. If seasons of idleness be dangerous, what must a continued habit of it prove? Habitual indolence, by a silent and secret progress, undermines every virtue in the soul. More violent passions run their course, and terminate. They are like rapid torrents, which foam, and swell, and bear down every thing before them. But after having overflowed their banks, their impetuosity subsides. They return, by degrees, into their natural channel ; and the damage which they have done can be repaired. Sloth is like the slowly-flowing, putrid stream, which stagnates in the marsh, breeds venomous animals, and poisonous plants ; and infects with pestilential vapours the whole country round it. Having once tainted the soul, it leaves no part of it sound ; and, at

* Prov. xxiv. 30, 31, 32.

† Prov. xxiv. 33, 34.

‡ Matt. xii. 44.

the same time, gives not those alarms to conscience, which the eruptions of bolder and fiercer emotions often occasion. The disease which it brings on is creeping and insidious; and is, on that account, more certainly mortal.

One constant effect of idleness is, to nourish the passions, and, of course, to heighten our demands for gratification; while it unhappily withdraws from us the proper means of gratifying these demands. If the desires of the industrious man be set upon opulence or rank, upon the conveniences or the splendour of life, he can accomplish his desires by methods which are fair and allowable. The idle man has the same desires with the industrious, but not the same resources for compassing his ends by honourable means. He must therefore turn himself to seek by fraud, or by violence, what he cannot submit to acquire by industry. Hence the origin of those multiplied crimes to which idleness is daily giving birth in the world; and which contribute so much to violate the order, and to disturb the peace, of society. — In general, the children of idleness may be ranked under two denominations or classes of men; both of whom may, too justly, be termed, The children of the devil. Either, incapable of any effort, they are such as sink into absolute meanness of character, and contentedly wallow with the drunkard and debauchee, among the herd of the sensual; until poverty overtakes them, or disease cuts them off: Or, they are such as, retaining some remains of vigour, are impelled, by their passions, to venture on a desperate attempt for retrieving their ruined fortunes. In this case, they employ the art of the fraudulent gamester to ensnare the unwary. They issue forth with the highwayman to plunder on the road; or, with the thief and the robber, they infest the city by night. From this class, our prisons are peopled; and by them the scaffold is furnished with those melancholy admonitions, which are so often delivered from it to the crowd. Such are frequently the tragical, but well-known, consequences of the vice against which I now warn you.

In the third, and last place, How dangerous soever idleness may be to virtue, are there not pleasures, it may be said, which attend it? Is there not ground to plead, that it brings a release from the oppressive cares of the world; and soothes the mind with a gentle satisfaction, which is not to be found amidst the toils of a busy and active life? — This is an advantage which, least of all others, we admit it to possess. In behalf of incessant labour, no man contends. Occasional release from toil, and indulgence of ease, is what nature demands, and virtue allows. But what we assert is, that nothing is so great an enemy to the lively and spirited enjoyment of life, as a relaxed and indolent habit of mind. He who knows not what it is to labour, knows not what it is to enjoy. The felicity of human life depends on the regular prosecution of some laudable purpose or object, which keeps awake and enlivens all our powers. Our happiness consists in the pursuit, much more than in the attainment, of any temporal good. Rest is agreeable; but it is only from preceding labours that rest acquires its true relish. When the mind is suffered to remain in continued inaction, all its powers decay. It soon languishes and

sickens; and the pleasures which it proposed to obtain from rest, end in tediousness and insipidity. To this, let that miserable set of men bear witness, who, after spending great part of their life in active industry, have retired to what they fancied was to be a pleasing enjoyment of themselves, in wealthy inactivity, and profound repose. Where they expected to find an elysium, they have found nothing but a dreary and comfortless waste. Their days have dragged on, in uniform languor; with the melancholy remembrance often returning, of the cheerful hours they passed, when they were engaged in the honest business and labours of the world.

We appeal to every one who has the least knowledge or observation of life, whether the busy, or the idle, have the most agreeable enjoyment of themselves? Compare them in their families. Compare them in the societies with which they mingle; and remark, which of them discover most cheerfulness and gaiety; which possess the most regular flow of spirits; whose temper is most equal; whose good humour most unclouded. While the active and diligent both enliven and enjoy society, the idle are not only a burden to themselves, but a burden to those with whom they are connected; a nuisance to all whom they oppress with their company. On whom does time hang so heavy, as on the slothful and lazy? To whom are the hours so lingering? Who are so often devoured with spleen, are obliged to fly to every expedient which can help them to get rid of themselves? Instead of producing tranquillity, indolence produces a fretful restlessness of mind; gives rise to cravings which are never satisfied; nourishes a sickly effeminate delicacy, which sours and corrupts every pleasure.

ENOUGH has now been said to convince every thinking person, of the folly, the guilt, and the misery, of an idle state. Let these admonitions stir us up, to exert ourselves in our different occupations, with that virtuous activity which becomes men and Christians. Let us arise from the bed of sloth; distribute our time with attention and care; and improve to advantage the opportunities which Providence has bestowed. The material business in which our several stations engage us, may often prove not sufficient to occupy the whole of our time and attention. In the life even of busy men, there are frequent intervals of leisure. Let them take care, that into these, none of the vices of idleness creep. Let some secondary, some subsidiary employment, of a fair and laudable kind, be always at hand to fill up those vacant spaces of life, which too many assign, either to corrupting amusements, or to mere inaction. We ought never to forget, that entire idleness always borders, either on misery, or on guilt.

At the same time, let the course of our employments be ordered in such a manner, that in carrying them on, we may be also promoting our eternal interest. With the business of the world, let us properly intermix the exercises of devotion. By religious duties, and virtuous actions, let us study to prepare ourselves for a better world. In the midst of our labours for this life, it is never to be forgotten, that we must *first seek the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and give diligence to make our calling and election sure.* Other-

wise, how active soever we may seem to be, our whole activity will prove only a laborious idleness: We shall appear, in the end, to have been busy to no purpose, or to a purpose worse than none. Then only we fulfil the proper character of Christians, when we join that pious zeal which becomes us as the servants of God, with that industry which is required of us, as good members of society; when, according to the exhortation of the Apostle, we are found *not slothful in business*, and, at the same time, *servent in spirit, serving the Lord*.*

SERMON XL.

ON THE SENSE OF THE DIVINE PRESENCE.

PSALM lxxiii. 23.

— *I am continually with thee* —

WE live in a world which is full of the Divine presence and power. We behold every where around us the traces of that supreme goodness which enlivens and supports the universe. *Day uttereth speech of it to day; and night sheweth knowledge of it to night*. Yet, surrounded as we are with the perfections of God, meeting him wherever we go, and called upon by a thousand objects, to confess his presence, it is both the misfortune and the crime of a great part of mankind that they are strangers to Him, in whose world they dwell. Occupied with nothing but their pursuits of interest and pleasure, they pass through this world, as though God were not there. The virtuous and reflecting are particularly distinguished from the giddy and dissolute, by that habitual sense of the Divine Presence which characterises the former. To them, nothing appears void of God. They contemplate his perfections in the works of nature; and they trace his Providence in the incidents of life. When retired from the world, he often employs their meditation. When engaged in action, he always influences their conduct. Wherever a pious man is, or whatever he does, in the style of the text, he is *continually with God*.

The happy effect of this sentiment on the heart, is fully displayed in the context. We see it allaying all the disquiet which the Psalmist, in the preceding verses, describes himself to have suffered on account of the prosperity of the wicked. The first reflection which restored tranquillity to his mind, was the remembrance of the presence of God. *Nevertheless, I am continually with thee; thou hast holden me by my right hand*. He came sensible, that whatever distresses the righteous might suffer for a time, they could not fail of being compensated in the end, by that Almighty Protector, whose propitious presence ever continued to surround them. Whereupon follow those memorable expressions of his trust and joy in God. *Thou shalt guide me with*

thy counsel; and afterwards receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth I desire besides thee.

THERE are principally two effects, which the sense of the Divine Presence is fitted to produce upon men. One is, to restrain them from vice; the other, to encourage their virtue. Its operation, as a check upon the sinner, is obvious. The perpetual presence of so powerful and venerable a witness, is one of the most awful considerations which can be addressed to the dissolute. It removes all the security which secrecy can be supposed to give to crimes. It aggravates the guilt of them, from being committed in the face of the Almighty; and has power to strike terror into the heart of the greatest criminal, in the midst of his misdeeds. While this principle of religion thus checks and terrifies the sinner, it produces also another effect, that of strengthening, and comforting the good man, in the practice of his duty. It is the influence of the Divine Presence on good men, which, in consequence of the Psalmist's sentiment, I purpose to consider. To their character, it belongs *to be continually with God*. I shall endeavour to show the high benefit and comfort which they derive from such a habit of mind; and shall, for this end, first consider their internal moral state; and next, view them as they are affected by several of the external accidents and situations of life.

LET us begin with considering them in their internal state. The belief of the Divine Presence acts upon them here, first, as an incitement to virtue. The presence of one whom we highly esteem and revere, of a sovereign, for instance, a father, or a friend, whose approbation we are solicitous to gain, is always found to exalt the powers of men, to refine and improve their behaviour. Hence, it has been given as a rule by ancient moralists, that, in order to excel in virtue, we should propound to ourselves some person of eminent and distinguished worth; and should accustom ourselves to act, as if he were standing by, and beholding us. To the esteem and approbation of their fellow-creatures, none are insensible. There are few, who, in the conspicuous parts of their life, when they know the eyes of the public to be fixed on them, act not their part with propriety and decorum. But what is the observation of the public; what is the presence of the greatest or wisest men on earth, to that presence of the Divinity which constantly surrounds us? The man who realizes to his mind this august Presence, feels a constant incentive for acquitting himself with dignity. He views himself as placed on an illustrious theatre. To have the Almighty for the spectator and witness of his conduct, is more to him than if the whole world were assembled to observe him. Men judge often falsely, always imperfectly, of what passes before them. They are imposed on by specious appearances; and the artful carry away the praise which is due to the deserving. Even supposing them to judge fairly, we may want the opportunity of doing justice to our character, by any proper display of it in the sight of the world. Our situation may bury in obscurity those talents and virtues which were entitled to command the highest esteem. But He, in whose presence the good man acts, is both an impartial, and

an unerring, judge of worth. No fallacious appearances impose on him. No secret virtue is hidden from him. He is attentive equally to the meanest and the greatest; and his approbation confers eternal rewards. The man therefore, who *sets the Lord always before him*, is prompted to excel in virtue, by motives which are peculiar to himself, and which engage, on the side of duty, both honour and interest. *I have kept thy precepts and thy testimonies; for all my ways are before thee.* *

SUPPOSING, however, his virtuous endeavours to be faithful, many imperfections will attend them. A faultless tenour of unblemished life is beyond the reach of man. Passions will sometimes overcome him; and ambition or interest, in an unguarded hour, will turn him aside into evil. Hence he will be ashamed of himself, and disquieted by a sense of guilt and folly. In this state, to which we are often reduced by the weakness of human nature, the belief of God's continual Presence brings relief to the heart. It acted before as an animating principle. It now acts as a principle of comfort. In the midst of many imperfections, a virtuous man appeals to his Divine witness, for the sincerity of his intentions. He can appeal to Him who *knows his frame*, that, in the general train of his conduct, it is his study to keep the law of God.

Mere law, among men, is rigid and inflexible. As no human law-giver can look into the hearts of his subjects, he cannot, even though he were ever present with them, estimate their character exactly. He can make no allowance for particular situations. He must prescribe the same terms to all whom he rules; and treat all alike, according to their outward actions. But every minute diversity of character, temper, and situation, is known to God. It is not only from what his servants do, but from what they seek to do, that he forms his judgment of them. He attends to all those circumstances which render the trial of their virtue, at any time, peculiarly hard. He hears the whisper of devotion as it rises in the soul. He beholds the tear of contrition which falls in secret. He sees the good intention struggling in its birth; and pursues it, in its progress, through those various obstacles which may prevent it from ripening into action. Good men, therefore, in their most humbled and dejected state, draw some consolation from his knowledge of their heart. Though they may sometimes have erred from the right path, they can look up to Him who is ever with them, and say, as an Apostle, who had grievously offended, once said to his great Master, *Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee.* †

Appealing thus to their omniscient witness, they are naturally soothed and encouraged by the hope of his clemency. At the same time, it is the peculiar advantage of this sentiment of the Divine Presence, that it prevents such hope from flattering them too much, or rising into undue presumption. For while it encourages, it tends also to humble, a pious man. If it encourage him, by the reflection on all his good dispositions being known and attended to by God, it humbles him by the remembrance, that *his secret sins also are ever in*

* Psalm cxix. 104.

† John, xxi. 17.

the light of the Divine countenance. So that, by dwelling under the sense of God being continually with us, we keep alive the proper temper of a Christian in the soul; humility, without dejection; fear, mingled with hope. We are cheered, without being lifted up. We feel ourselves obnoxious to the all-observing eye of justice; but are comforted with the thoughts of that mercy, which, through Jesus Christ, the Discerner of all Hearts, holds forth to the sincere and penitent.—Such are the blessed effects which this principle of religion produces upon the inward moral state of a good man. Let us now,

IN the second place, consider his external circumstances; and examine the influence which the same principle has upon his happiness, in several different situations of life.

LET us first view him in what the world calls prosperity; when his circumstances are easy or affluent, and his life flows in a smooth untroubled stream. Here, it might be thought, that a sense of the Divine Presence could operate upon him only, or chiefly, for promoting temperance, and restraining the disorders incident to a prosperous state. Valuable effects, indeed, these are; and most conducive to the true enjoyment of all that is agreeable in life. But though it, doubtless, does exert this salutary influence, yet it stops not there. It not only preserves the virtue of a good man amidst the temptations of pleasure, but it gives to his prosperity a security, and a peculiar relish, which to others is unknown. He who is without a sense of God upon his mind, beholds in human affairs nothing but a perpetual fluctuation, and vicissitude of events. He is surrounded with unknown causes, which may be working his destruction in secret. He cannot avoid perceiving, that there hangs over him the irresistible arm of that Providence, whose displeasure he has done nothing to stay or avert. But he who, in the day of prosperity, dwells with God, is delivered from those disquieting alarms. He dwells as with a friend and protector, from whom he conceives his blessings to proceed. He can appeal to him for the thankfulness with which he receives them; and for his endeavours to employ them well. He trusts that the God whom he serves, will not forsake him; that the goodness which he has already experienced, will continue to bless him; and though he believes himself not exempted from the changes of the world, yet, in the midst of these, he has ground to hope, that sources of comfort and happiness shall always be left open to him.

Moreover, the pleasures of life, while they last, are unspeakably heightened by the presence of that Benefactor who bestows them. The pleasing emotion of gratitude to the giver, mingles with the enjoyment of the gift. While to the mere worldly man, the whole frame of nature is only a vast irregular fabric; and the course of human affairs no more than a confused succession of fortuitous events: all nature is beautified, and every agreeable incident is enlivened, to him who beholds God in all things. Hence arise a variety of pleasing sensations, to fill up those solitary hours, in which external prosperity supplies him with no entertainment. In the smiling scenes of nature, he contemplates the benignity of its Author. In its sublime

objects, he admires his majesty. In its awful and terrible ones, he adores his power. He dwells in this world as in a magnificent temple, which is full of the glory of its founder; and every where views nature offering up its incense to him, from a thousand altars. Such ideas exalt and ennoble the human mind; and reflect an additional lustre on the brightness of prosperity.

From the prosperous, let us next turn to the afflicted condition of a good man. For as prosperity may, affliction certainly will, at one time or other, be his lot. It enters into the appointed trial of his virtue; and, in one degree or other, is the doom of all. Here we shall find various situations occur, in which no relief is equal to what a virtuous and holy man derives from a sense of the perpetual presence of God.

Is he, for instance, thrown into an obscure condition in the world, without friends to assist him, or any to regard and consider his estate? He enjoys the satisfaction of thinking, that though he may be neglected by men, he is not forgotten of God. Inconsiderable as he is in himself, he knows, that he will not be overlooked by the Almighty, amidst the infinite variety of being, or lost in the immensity of his works. The poor man can, with as much encouragement as the rich or great, lift up his eyes to heaven, and say, *Nevertheless, O Lord, I am continually with thee: Thou holdest me by my right hand.* The gracious presence of that Supreme Being is affected by no diversity of rank or fortune. It imparts itself alike to all the virtuous and upright; like its glorious image, the sun in the firmament, which sheds its rays equally upon the humble cottage, and upon the palace of kings. In the presence of the great Lord of heaven and earth, all the distinctions which vanity has contrived to make among men, totally disappear. All ranks are on one level. *The rich and the poor here indeed meet together;* without any other distinction than what arises from the heart and the soul. The sense of this, lifts the poor man above contempt; supports his spirits, when apt to be dejected; and bestows dignity on the part which he acts. How inconsiderable soever that part may appear in the estimation of an injudicious world, it is ennobled, when virtuously performed, by the approbation of his Divine witness. He can bear with indifference the scorn of the proud, as long as he knows, that there is one higher than the highest to regard him. He can enjoy himself with pleasure in his mean habitation, because he believes that God dwells with him there. The Divine Presence cheers to him the most lonely retreat. It accompanies his steps to the most distant regions of the earth. If he should be driven into exile from all his friends, and obliged to *dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea,* even there God's hand would hold him, and his right hand would guide him. Though left without companion or friend, he never thinks himself desolate, as long as he can say, *I am still with God.*

But though raised above obscurity or poverty, yet, in any situation of fortune, calumny and reproach may be the lot of the servant of God. His good intentions may be misconstrued; his character unjustly traduced; and, to the open reviling of enemies, the

more bitter unkindness of friends may sometimes be joined. In this situation, when wounded in spirit, and, perhaps, unable to make his innocence appear, to whom shall he have recourse for defence, to whom make his last appeal, but to that God who is ever present with him, and who knoweth his heart? How frequently, amidst the injustice and oppression of the world, has distressed innocence had no other relief but this? "God is my witness. God is my avenger. He hath seen it, and he will repay." A good conscience, it is true, is, of itself, a powerful support. But God is Lord of the conscience; and it is only when connected with a sense of Divine Presence and approbation, that a good conscience becomes a steady principle of fortitude in the mind, under all discouragements. Hence, a virtuous man possesses a high degree of independence, both on the praise and on the censure of the world. It is enough to him, if, when undergoing the same reproaches which Job suffered from his mistaken friends, he can say with him, *Behold my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high.* * He affects not to divulge his good deeds to the world. He is without concern whether the world be acquainted with them or not. He knoweth that his *Father which is in heaven seeth in secret*; and that *his prayers and his alms come up in grateful memorial before him. With me, it is a small thing to be judged of you, or of man's judgment; he that judgeth me, is the Lord.* † He shall bring forth my righteousness, at last, as the light, and my judgment as the noon-day. In this consciousness of integrity, he looks down with indifference, as from a superiour station, upon the harsh censures of a giddy and ignorant world. The sense of being continually with God, diffuses over his soul a holy calm, which unjust reproach cannot disturb. In the presence of that august and venerable witness, all the noise and clamours of men, like the murmurings of a distant storm, die away.

LASTLY, Supposing the character of a good man to be untainted by reproach, supposing also his external situation to be opulent or distinguished; many, notwithstanding, and severe, are the distresses to which he may be exposed. Secret griefs may be preying upon him; and his heart left to feed in silence on his own bitterness. He may labour under sore disease, and discern his earthly frame gradually moulder into dust. He may be deprived of those friends and relatives who had been the chief comforts of his state; or may be obliged to prepare himself for taking farewell of them for ever. In the midst of these various afflicting scenes of human life, no consolation can be more powerful than what arises from the presence of a Divine protector and guardian, to whom our case, with all its sorrows, is perfectly known. *To him, says the Psalmist, I poured out my complaint. I shewed before him my trouble. I looked on my right hand, and viewed; but, behold there was no man who cared for my soul. I said unto thee, O Lord, thou art my refuge. When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path.* ‡

We all know, that to communicate our griefs to a faithful friend, often gives ease and relief to the burdened heart. Such communi-

* Job, xvi. 19.

† 1 Cor. iv. 3, 4.

‡ Psalm cxlii. 2, 3, 4.

cation we are encouraged to make, and such relief we may expect to find, in pouring out our heart before that God *in whom compassions flow*. We may have no earthly friend to whom we can with full confidence disclose all our sorrows; or we may want words in which to express them. But God is the searcher of all hearts; and the hearer of all prayers. To the secret anguish of the soul, he is no inattentive witness. Every groan which is heaved from the labouring bosom, though heard by no human ear, reaches his throne. As he *knows our frame*, so he *remembers we are dust*; and thence *light arises to the upright in darkness*. For the hope naturally springs, that this beneficent Being will pity them, *as a father pitieth his children*; and, in the midst of those distresses which the present circumstances of man render unavoidable, will *send them help from his sanctuary*. Surrounded with this compassionate presence of the Almighty, good men never view themselves as left in this vale of tears, to bear, solitary and alone, the whole weight of human woe. In their dark, as well as in their brighter hours, God is with them. Even in that valley of the shadow of death, where no friend, no comforter, can go along to aid them, he is with them still. In the last extremity of nature, *the rod and staff of the Shepherd of Israel support them*.

Thus I have shown, though in an imperfect manner, what benefits holy men derive from a habitual sense of the Divine Presence. It animates and strengthens their virtue. It enlivens and brightens their prosperity. Under various forms of adversity, it affords them consolation and relief.—Such considerations, undoubtedly, form a strong argument in favour of a devout spirit, and a virtuous life. But they are considerations which may, probably, be regarded by some, as ideal and visionary; requiring aid from a heated, or an enthusiastic, fancy, in order to give them force. I readily admit, that, amidst the hurry and turbulence of the world, it may be difficult to bring these religious sentiments as fully into view, as is necessary for their making a just impression on the soul. This requires the effort of an intelligent and feeling mind; and therefore cannot be expected to be commonly found. To the unreflecting crowd, nothing appears real, but what is exposed to sense. What is invisible, is the same to them, as if it had no existence. But by the grossness of their own conceptions, they have no title to measure those of others. While they affect to treat all considerations taken from the sense of the Divine Presence as visionary and enthusiastic, it can, on the contrary, be clearly shown, that they are founded on the most certain and unquestionable principles of reason. They essentially belong not to revealed only but to natural religion. Their reality can be denied by none, but those who deny that God exists, or that he governs the world. For if he exists, he must undoubtedly pervade and inspect the world which he governs. He must know what is going on throughout his own universe; and especially must know what passes within the hearts which he has made, and of which he is to judge. To be every where present, is the attribute of his nature, which, of all others, is the most necessary to his administration of the universe. This, accordingly, is an attribute which all religions have ascribed to

him. All nations have believed in it. All societies appeal to it, in the solemnities of an oath, by which they determine controversies. This attribute being once admitted to belong to the Deity, the consequences which I have deduced from it plainly and naturally follow : And every good man has ground to say, *O Lord, I am continually with thee.*

SERMON XLI.

ON PATIENCE.

LUKE, xxi. 19.

In your Patience possess ye your souls.

THE *possession of our souls* is a very emphatical expression. It describes that state in which a man has both the full command, and the undisturbed enjoyment, of himself; in opposition to his undergoing some inward agitation which discomposes his powers. Upon the least reflection it must appear, how essential such a state of mind is to happiness. He only who thus *possesses his soul* is capable of possessing any other thing with advantage; and, in order to attain and preserve this self-possession, the most important requisite is, the habitual exercise of patience.

I know that patience is apt to be ranked, by many, among the more humble and obscure virtues; belonging chiefly to those who groan on a sick bed, or who languish in a prison. If their situation be, happily, of a different kind, they imagine that there is no occasion for the discipline of patience being preached to them. But I hope to make it appear, that, in every circumstance of life, no virtue is more important, both to duty and to happiness; or more requisite for forming a manly and worthy character. It is not confined to a situation of continued adversity. It principally, indeed, regards the disagreeable circumstances which are apt to occur. But in our present state, the occurrence of these is so frequent, that, in every condition of life, Patience is incessantly called forth. Prosperity cannot be enjoyed, any more than adversity supported, without it. It must enter into the temper, and form the habit of the soul, if we would pass through the world with tranquillity and honour. What I purpose is to point out some of the chief occasions on which Patience is required; and to recommend and enforce the exercise of it, in order to *our possessing our souls*.

I. PATIENCE under provocations. The wide circle of human society is diversified by an endless variety of characters, dispositions, and passions. Uniformity is, in no respect, the genius of the world. Every man is marked by some peculiarity which distinguishes him from another; and no where can two individuals be found who are exactly, and in all respects, alike. Where so much diversity obtains, it cannot but happen, that, in the intercourse which men are obliged

to maintain, their tempers shall often be ill adjusted to that intercourse; shall ~~for~~ and interfere with each other. Hence, in every station, the highest as well as the lowest, and in every condition of life, public, private, and domestic, occasions of irritation frequently arise. We are provoked, sometimes by the folly and levity of those with whom we are connected; sometimes by their indifference, or neglect; by the incivility of a friend, the haughtiness of a superiour, or the insolent behaviour of one in lower station. Hardly a day passes, without somewhat or other occurring, which serves to ruffle the man of impatient spirit. Of course, such a man lives in a continual storm. He knows not what it is to enjoy a train of good humour. Servants, neighbours, friends, spouse, and children, all, through the unrestrained violence of his temper, become sources of disturbance and vexation to him. In vain is affluence; in vain are health and prosperity. The least trifle is sufficient to discompose his mind, and poison his pleasures. His very amusements are mixed with turbulence and passion.

I would beseech this man to consider, of what small moment the provocations which he receives, or at least imagines himself to receive, are really in themselves; but of what great moment he makes them, by suffering them to deprive him of the possession of himself. I would beseech him to consider, how many hours of happiness he throws away, which a little more patience would allow him to enjoy; and how much he puts it in the power of the most insignificant persons to render him miserable. "But who can expect," we hear him exclaim, "that he is to possess the insensibility of a stone? How ~~is~~ is it possible for human nature to endure so many repeated provocations? or to bear calmly with such unreasonable behaviour?"—My brother! If you can bear with no instances of unreasonable behaviour, withdraw yourself from the world. You are no longer fit to live in it. Leave the intercourse of men. Retreat to the mountain and the desert; or shut yourself up in a cell. For here, in the midst of society, *offences must come*. You might as well expect, when you beheld a calm atmosphere, and a clear sky, that no clouds were ever to rise, and no winds to blow, as that your life was long to proceed, without receiving provocations from human frailty. The careless and the imprudent, the giddy and the fickle, the ungrateful and the interested, every where meet us. They are the briars and the thorns, with which the paths of human life are beset. He only who can hold his course among them with patience and equanimity, he who is prepared to bear what he must expect to happen, is worthy of the name of a man.

* Did you only preserve yourself composed for a moment, you would perceive the insignificancy of most of those provocations which you magnify so highly. When a few suns more have rolled over your head, the storm will have, of itself, subsided; the cause of your present impatience and disturbance will be utterly forgotten. Can you not, then, anticipate this hour of calmness to yourself; and begin to enjoy the peace which it will certainly bring? If others have behaved improperly, leave them to their own folly, without becoming

the victim of their caprice, and punishing yourself on their account. — Patience, in this exercise of it, cannot be too much studied by all who wish their life to flow in a smooth stream. It is the reason of a man, in opposition to the passion of a child. It is the enjoyment of peace, in opposition to uproar and confusion. *He that hath no rule over his own spirit, is like a city that is broken down, and without walls.**

— The next important exercise of Patience is,

II. PATIENCE under disappointments. These will often happen to the best and wisest men; sometimes to the wisest and best-concerted plans. They may happen, too, not through any imprudence of those who have devised the plan, not even through the malice or ill design of others; but merely in consequence of some of those cross incidents of life which could not be foreseen. On such occasions, persons of a warm and sanguine temper are presently in a ferment. They had formed their hopes, as they think, upon the justest grounds. They had waited long for success; and borne with many delays. But when their designs are brought to so unexpected an issue; when, without any fault of their own, they find their hopes finally blasted, all patience forsakes them; they no longer possess their souls; the most passionate exclamations break forth. “To whom, except to them, could such a disappointment have happened? Since the creation of the world, was such a combination of disastrous incidents ever beheld? Why are they doomed to be so unfortunate beyond all others?” — Alas! how unskilfully have you calculated the course of human events? How rashly and presumptuously had you trusted to success? To whom was it ever given, to guard against all the vicissitudes, which the fluctuating *fashion of the world* is incessantly bringing about? If one friend, to whom you looked up, has died, or another has lost his influence and power; if the opinion of the public is changed, and its favour has been withdrawn; if some mistakes have occurred to lessen the goodwill of a patron on whom you depended; if, through the concurrence of these, or such like circumstances, a more fortunate rival has prevailed against you; what is there in all this, that differs from the ordinary lot of man? Are we not, each in his turn, doomed to experience the uncertainty of worldly pursuits? Why, then, aggravate our misfortunes by the unreasonable violence of an impatient spirit? If our designs have failed through rashness or misconduct, let us blame ourselves. If they have failed through circumstances which we could not prevent, let us submit to the fate of man; and wait, with patience, till a more favourable opportunity shall occur of regaining success.

Meanwhile, let us turn to the other side of the prospect; and calmly consider how dubious it was, whether the success which we longed for would have proved a blessing. *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?* Perhaps, the accomplishment of our designs might have been pregnant with misery. Perhaps, from our present disappointment, future prosperity may rise. Of such unlooked-for issues, we all know there have been many examples. Who can tell,

whether our case may not add one to the number? — At any rate, let us recollect, that there is a Supreme Ruler, who disposes of the affairs of men; under whom, all second causes work only as subordinate agents. Looking up to that irresistible arm which is stretched over our heads, let us be calm; let us submit, and adore. Either to despair, or to rage, under disappointments, is sinful. By the former, we injure ourselves; by the latter, we insult Providence, and provoke its displeasure to continue. *To possess our souls in patience* is, at once, our wisdom as men, and our duty as Christians. The benefits of this virtue are so often repeated in this world, that good policy alone would recommend it to every thinking man. Disappointments derange, and overcome, vulgar minds. The patient and the wise, by a proper improvement, frequently make them contribute to their high advantage. — Let me next recommend,

III. PATIENCE under restraints. Numerous are the restraints imposed on us, by the nature of the human condition. To the restraints of authority and law, all must submit. The restraints of education and discipline lie on the young. Considerations of health restrain the indulgence of pleasure. Attentions to fortune restrain expence. Regard to friends, whom we are bound to please; respect to established customs, and to the opinions of society, impose restraint on our general behaviour. There is no man, in any rank of life, who is always at liberty to act according as he would incline. In some quarter or other, he is limited by circumstances, that either actually confine, or that ought at least to confine and restrain him.

These restraints, the impatient are apt to scorn. They will needs burst the barriers which reason had erected, or their situation had formed; and, without regard to consequences, give free scope to their present wish. Hence, many dangerous excesses flow; much confusion and misery are produced in human life. Had men the patience to submit to their condition, and to wait till it should allow them a freer indulgence of their desires, they might, in a short time, obtain the power of gratifying them with safety. If the young, for instance, would undergo, with patience, the labours of education, they would rise, at a proper period, to honours, riches, or ease. If the infirm would, with patience, bear the regulations which their constitution demands, they might regain the comforts of health. If persons of straitened fortune had patience to conform themselves to their circumstances, and to abridge their pleasures, they might, by degrees, improve and advance their state. Whereas, by eagerness of temper, and precipitancy of indulgence, they forfeit all the advantages which patience would have procured; and incur the opposite evils to their full extent.

In the present state of human affairs, no lesson is more necessary to be learned by all, to be inculcated on the young, and to be practised by the old, than that of patient submission to necessity. For, under the law of necessity, we are all inevitably placed. No man is, or can be, always his own master. We are obliged, in a thousand cases, to submit and obey. The discipline of patience preserves our minds easy, by conforming them to our state. By the impetuosity

of an impatient and unsubmitting temper, we fight against an unconquerable power; and aggravate the evils we must endure. — Another important exercise of the virtue concerning which we discourse, is,

IV. PATIENCE under injuries and wrongs. To these, amidst the present confusion of the world, all are exposed. No station is so high, no power so great, no character so unblemished, as to exempt men from being attacked by rashness, malice, or envy. To behave under such attacks with due patience and moderation, is, it must be confessed, one of the most trying exercises of virtue. But, in order to prevent mistakes on this subject, it is necessary to observe, that a tame submission to wrongs is not required by religion. We are, by no means, to imagine, that religion tends to extinguish the sense of honour, or to suppress the exertion of a manly spirit. It is under a false apprehension of this kind, that Christian patience is sometimes stigmatised in discourse as no other than a different name for cowardice. On the contrary, every man of virtue ought to feel what is due to his character, and to support properly his own rights. Resentment of wrong, is an useful principle in human nature; and for the wisest purposes, was implanted in our frame. It is the necessary guard of private rights; and the great restraint on the insolence of the violent, who, if no resistance were made, would trample on the gentle and peaceable.

Resentment, however, if not kept within due bounds, is in hazard of rising into fierce and cruel revenge. It is the office of patience, to temper resentment by reason. In this view, it is most properly described in the Text, by a man's *possessing his soul*; acting the part which self-defence, which justice, or honour, require him to act, without being transported out of himself by the vehemence of anger; or insisting on such degrees of reparation as bear no proportion to the wrong that he has suffered. What proportion, for instance, is there between the life of a man, and an affront received by some rash expression in conversation, which the wise would have slighted; and which, in the course of a few weeks, would have been forgotten by every one? How fantastic, then, how unjustifiable, are those supposed laws of modern honour, which, for such an affront, require no less reparation than the death of a fellow-creature; and which, to obtain this reparation, require a man to endanger his own life? Laws which, as they have no foundation in reason, never received the least sanction from any of the wise and polished nations of antiquity; but were devised in the darkest ages of the world, and are derived to us from the ferocious barbarity of Gothic manners.

Nothing is so inconsistent with self-possession as violent anger. It overpowers reason; confounds our ideas; distorts the appearance, and blackens the colour, of every object. By the storm which it raises within, and by the mischiefs which it occasions without, it generally brings, on the passionate and revengeful man, greater misery than he can bring on his enemy. Patience allays this destructive tempest, by making room for the return of calm and sober thought. It suspends the blow which sudden resentment was ready to inflict. It disposes us to attend to the alleviating circumstances

which may be discovered in the midst of the wrongs we suppose ourselves to have suffered. Hence it naturally inclines to the moderate and gentle side; and while it allows all proper measures to be taken, both for safety, and for just redress, it makes way for returning peace. Without some degree of patience exercised under injuries, human life would be rendered a state of perpetual hostility; offences and retaliations would succeed to one another in endless train; and the world would become a field of blood. — It now remains to recommend,

V. PATIENCE under adversity and affliction. This is the most common sense in which this virtue is understood; as it respects disease, poverty, old age, loss of friends, and the other calamities which are incident to human life. *Though a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.** The various duties to which patience, under this view, gives rise, afford a larger subject to discourse than I am at present to pursue. In general, there are two chief exercises of patience under adversity; one respecting God, and another respecting men.

Patience with respect to God, must, in the days of trouble, suppress the risings of a murmuring and rebellious spirit. It must appear in that calm resignation to the will of Heaven, which is expressed in those pious sentiments of ancient good men: *I was dumb; I opened not my mouth, because thou didst it. It is the Lord, let him do what seemeth good in his eyes. Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil also?* This is loyalty to the great Governour of the universe. This is that reverence which so well becomes creatures who know they are dependent, and who must confess themselves to be sinful. Such a spirit is fitted to attract the favour of Heaven, and to bring the severe visitation sooner to a close. Whereas the stubborn and impatient, who submit not themselves to the decrees of the Most High, require to be humbled and subdued by a continuance of chastisement.

Patience in adversity, with respect to men, must appear by the composure and tranquillity of our behaviour. The loud complaint, the querulous temper, and fretful spirit, disgrace every character. They show a mind that is unmanned by misfortunes. We weaken thereby the sympathy of others; and estrange them from the offices of kindness and comfort. The exertions of pity will be feeble, when it is mingled with contempt. At the same time, by thus weakly yielding to adversity, we allow its weight to bear us down with double pressure. Patience, by preserving composure within, resists the impression which trouble makes from without. By leaving the mind open to every consolation, it naturally tends to alleviate our burden. — To maintain a steady and unbroken mind, amidst all the shocks of the world, forms the highest honour of a man. Patience, on such occasions, rises to magnanimity. It shows a great and noble mind, which is able to rest on itself, on God, and a good conscience: which can enjoy itself amidst all evils; and would rather

endure the greatest hardships, than submit to what was dishonourable, in order to obtain relief. This gives proof of a strength that is derived from Heaven. It is a beam of the immortal light, shining on the heart. Such patience is the most complete triumph of religion and virtue; and accordingly it has ever characterised those whose names have been transmitted with honour to posterity. It has ennobled the hero, the saint, and the martyr. *We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.**

THUS I have traced Patience through several of its most important operations in different circumstances of life; under provocations; under disappointments; under restraints; under injuries; and under afflictions. We now see, that it is a virtue of universal use. No man, in any condition, can pass his days with tolerable comfort who has not learned to practise it. His prosperity will be continually disturbed; and his adversity will be clouded with double darkness. He will be uneasy and troublesome to all with whom he is connected; and will be more troublesome to himself than to any other. — Let me particularly advise those who wish to cultivate so necessary a virtue, to begin their cultivation of it, on occasions when small offences and provocations arise. It is a great, but common error to imagine, that we are at liberty to give loose reins to temper among the trivial occurrences of life. No excuse for irritation and impatience can be worse, than what is taken from the person being inconsiderable, or the incident being slight, which threw us off our guard. With inconsiderable persons we are surrounded. Of slight incidents, the bulk of human life is composed. In the midst of these, the ruling temper of the mind is formed. It is only by moderation and self-command then acquired, that we can inure ourselves to patience, when the great conjunctures of life shall put it to a severer trial. If neglected then, we shall afterwards solicit its return in vain. *If thou hast run with footmen, and they have wearied thee, how canst thou contend with horses? And if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swellings of Jordan?†*

In order to assist us in the acquisition of this grace, let us often contemplate that great model of it, which is displayed in the whole life of our Saviour Jesus Christ. Whose temper was ever tried by more frequent provocations, more repeated disappointments, more flagrant injuries, or more severe distress? Yet, amidst them all, we behold him patiently enduring *the contradiction of sinners*; to their rudeness, opposing a mild and unruffled, though firm, spirit; and, in the cause of mankind, generously bearing with every indignity. Well might he say, *Learn of me, for I am meek, and lowly in heart.‡* Having such a high example before our eyes, let us be ashamed of those sallies of impatience which we so often suffer to break forth in the midst of prosperity. By a more manly tranquillity and self-command, let us discover to the world, that, as men, and as Christians, we have learned *in patience to possess our souls.*

* 2 Cor. iv. 8, 9.

† Jer. xlii. 5.

‡ Matt. xi. 29.

SERMON XLII.

ON MODERATION.

PHIL. iv. 5.

Let your Moderation be known unto all men.

THE present state of man is neither doomed to constant misery, nor designed for complete happiness. It is, in general, a mixed state, of comfort and sorrow, of prosperity and adversity; neither brightened by uninterrupted sunshine, nor overcast with perpetual shade; but subject to alternate successions of the one, and the other. While such a state forbids despair, it also checks presumption. It is equally adverse to despondency of mind, and to high elevation of spirits. The temper which best suits, is expressed in the Text by *moderation*; which, as the habitual tenour of the soul, the Apostle exhorts us to discover in our whole conduct; *let it be known unto all men*. This virtue consists in the equal balance of the soul. It imports such proper government of our passions and pleasures, as shall prevent us from running into extremes of any kind; and shall produce a calm and temperate frame of mind. It chiefly respects our conduct in that state which comes under the description of ease, or prosperity. Patience, of which I treated in the preceding Discourse, directs the proper regulation of the mind, under the disagreeable incidents of life. Moderation determines the bounds within which it should remain, when circumstances are agreeable or promising. What I now purpose is, to point out some of the chief instances in which Moderation ought to take place, and to show the importance of preserving it.

I. MODERATION in our wishes. The active mind of man seldom or never rests satisfied with its present condition, how prosperous soever. Originally formed for a wider range of objects, for a higher sphere of enjoyments, it finds itself, in every situation of fortune, straitened and confined. Sensible of deficiency in its state, it is ever sending forth the fond desire, the aspiring wish, after something beyond what is enjoyed at present. Hence, that restlessness which prevails so generally among mankind. Hence, that disgust of pleasures which they have tried; that passion for novelty; that ambition of rising to some degree of eminence or felicity, of which they have formed to themselves an indistinct idea. All which may be considered as indications of a certain native, original greatness in the human soul, swelling beyond the limits of its present condition, and pointing at the higher objects for which it was made. Happy, if these latent remains of our primitive state served to direct our wishes towards their proper destination, and to lead us into the path of true bliss!

But, in this dark and bewildered state, the aspiring tendency of our nature unfortunately takes an opposite direction, and feeds a very misplaced ambition. The flattering appearances which here present

themselves to sense; the distinctions which fortune confers; the advantages and pleasures which we imagine the world to be capable of bestowing, fill up the ultimate wish of most men. These are the objects which engross their solitary musings, and stimulate their active labours; which warm the breast of the young, animate the industry of the middle-aged, and often keep alive the passions of the old, until the very close of life. Assuredly, there is nothing unlawful in our wishing to be freed from whatever is disagreeable, and to obtain a fuller enjoyment of the comforts of life. But when these wishes are not tempered by reason, they are in danger of precipitating us into much extravagance and folly. Desires and wishes are the first springs of action. When they become exorbitant, the whole character is likely to be tainted. If we suffer our fancy to create to itself worlds of ideal happiness; if we feed our imagination with plans of opulence and splendour far beyond our rank; if we fix to our wishes certain stages of high advancement, or certain degrees of uncommon reputation or distinction, as the sole stations of felicity; the assured consequence will be, that we shall become unhappy in our present state; unfit for acting the part, and discharging the duties that belong to it; we shall discompose the peace and order of our minds, and foment many hurtful passions. Here, then, let Moderation begin its reign; by bringing within reasonable bounds the wishes that we form. As soon as they become extravagant, let us check them by proper reflections on the fallacious nature of those objects which the world hangs out to allure desire.

You have strayed, my friends, from the road which conducts to felicity; you have dishonoured the native dignity of your souls, in allowing your wishes to terminate on nothing higher than worldly ideas of greatness or happiness. Your imagination roves in a land of shadows. Unreal forms deceive you. It is no more than a phantom, an illusion of happiness which attracts your fond admiration; nay, an illusion of happiness which often conceals much real misery. Do you imagine, that all are happy, who have attained to those summits of distinction, towards which your wishes aspire? Alas! how frequently has experience showed, that where roses were supposed to bloom, nothing but briars and thorns grew? Reputation, beauty, riches, grandeur, nay, royalty itself, would, many a time, have been gladly exchanged by the possessors, for that more quiet and humble station, with which you are now dissatisfied. With all that is splendid and shining in the world, it is decreed that there should mix many deep shades of woe. On the elevated situations of fortune, the great calamities of life chiefly fall. There the storm spends its violence, and there the thunder breaks; while safe and unhurt the inhabitant of the vale remains below. -- Retreat, then, from those vain and pernicious excursions of extravagant desire. Satisfy yourselves with what is rational and attainable. Train your minds to moderate views of human life, and human happiness. Remember, and admire, the wisdom of Agur's wish. *Remove far from me vanity and lies. Give me neither poverty nor riches. Feed me with food convenient for me. Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I*

*be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain.** † Let me recommend,

II. MODERATION in our pursuits. Wishes and desires rest within. If immoderate and improper, though they taint the heart, yet society may not be affected by them. The obscure and harmless individual may indulge his dreams, without disturbing the public peace. But when the active pursuits in which we engage rise beyond moderation, they fill the world with great disorders; often with flagrant crimes. This admonition chiefly respects the ambitious men of the world. I say not that all ambition is to be condemned; or that high pursuits ought, on every occasion, to be checked. Some men are formed by nature, for rising into conspicuous stations of life. In following the impulse of their minds, and properly exerting the talents with which God has blessed them, there is room for ambition to act in a laudable sphere, and to become the instrument of much public good. But this may safely be pronounced, that the bulk of men are ready to over-rate their own abilities, and to imagine themselves equal to higher things than they were ever designed for by nature. Be sober, therefore, in fixing your aims, and planning your destined pursuits. Beware of being led aside from the plain path of sound and moderate conduct, by those false lights which self-flattery is always ready to hang out. By aiming at a mark too high, you may fall short of what it was within your power to have reached. Instead of attaining to eminence, you may expose yourselves to derision; nay, may bring upon your heads manifold disasters. *I say to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly.†*

Whatever your aims be, there is one exercise of moderation which must be enjoined to those of the greatest abilities, as well as to others; that is, never to transgress the bounds of moral duty. Amidst the warmth of pursuit, accustom yourselves to submit to the restraints, which religion and virtue, which propriety and decency, which regard to reputation and character, impose. Think not, that there are no barriers which ought to stop your progress. It is from a violent and impetuous spirit that all the evils spring, which are so often found to accompany ambition. Hence, in private life, the laws of truth and honour are violated. Hence, in public contests, the peace and welfare of nations have been so often sacrificed to the ambitious projects of the great. The man of moderation, as he is temperate in his wishes, so in his pursuits he is regulated by virtue. A good conscience is to him more valuable than any success. He is not so much bent on the accomplishment of any design, as to take a dishonourable step, in order to compass it. He can have patience. He can brook disappointments. He can yield to unsurmountable obstacles; and, by gentle and gradual progress, is more likely to succeed in the end, than others are, by violence and impetuosity. In his highest enterprise, he wishes not to have the appearance of a meteor, which fires the atmosphere; or of a comet, which astonishes the public by its blazing, eccentric course; but rather to resemble those steady lumin-

* Prov. xxx. 8, 9.

† Rom. xii. 3.

aries of heaven, which advance in their orbits with a silent and regular motion. He approves himself thereby to the virtuous, the wise, and discerning; and, by a temperate and unexceptionable conduct, escapes those dangers which persons of an opposite description are perpetually ready to incur.

III. Be moderate in your expectations. When your state is flourishing, and the course of events proceeds according to your wish, suffer not your minds to be vainly lifted up. Flatter not yourselves with high prospects of the increasing favours of the world, and the continuing applause of men. Say not within your hearts, *My mountain stands strong, and shall never be moved. I shall never see adversity. To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundantly.*—You are betraying yourselves; you are laying a sure foundation of disappointment and misery, when you allow your fancy to soar to such lofty pinacles of confident hope. By building your house in this airy region, you are preparing for yourselves a great and cruel fall. *Your trust is the spider's web. You may lean on your house; but it shall not stand. You may hold it fast; but it shall not endure.* For, to man on earth it was never granted, to gratify all his hopes; or to persevere in one tract of uninterrupted prosperity. Unpleasing vicissitudes never fail to succeed those that were grateful. *The fashion of the world, how gay or smiling soever, passeth, and often passeth suddenly, away.*

By want of moderation in our hopes, we not only increase dejection when disappointment comes, but we accelerate disappointment; we bring forward, with greater speed, disagreeable changes in our state. For the natural consequence of presumptuous expectation, is rashness in conduct. He who indulges confident security, of course neglects due precautions against the dangers that threaten him; and his fall will be foreseen and predicted. He not only exposes himself unguarded to dangers, but he multiplies them against himself. By presumption and vanity, he either provokes enmity, or incurs contempt.

The arrogant mind, and the proud hope, are equally contrary to religion, and to prudence. The world cannot bear such a spirit; and Providence seldom fails to check it. The Almighty beholds with displeasure those who, intoxicated with prosperity, forget their dependence on that Supreme Power which raised them up. His awful government of the world has been in nothing more conspicuous than in bringing low the lofty looks of man, and scattering the proud in the imaginations of their minds.—*Is not this the great Babylon which I have built by the might of my power, and for the honour of my Majesty?** Thus exclaimed the presumptuous monarch in the pride of his heart. But, lo! when the word was yet in his mouth, the visitation from Heaven came, and the voice was heard; *O, Nebuchadnezzar! to thee it is spoken; thy kingdom is departed from thee.—He that exalteth himself, shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted.*† A temperate spirit, and moderate expectations, are the best safeguard of the mind in this uncertain and changing

* Dan. iv. 30, 31.

† Luke, xiv. 11.

state. They enable us to pass through life with most comfort. When we rise in the world, they contribute to our elevation; and if we must fall, they render our fall the lighter.

IV. MODERATION in our pleasures is an important exercise of the virtue which we are now considering. It is an invariable law of our present condition, that every pleasure which is pursued to excess, converts itself into poison. What was intended for the cordial and refreshment of human life, through want of moderation, we turn to its bane. In all the pleasures of sense, it is apparent, that only when indulged within certain limits, they confer satisfaction. No sooner do we pass the line which temperance has drawn, than pernicious effects come forward and show themselves. Could I lay open to your view the monuments of death, they would read a lecture in favour of moderation, much more powerful than any that the most eloquent preacher can give. You would behold the graves peopled with the victims of intemperance. You would behold those chambers of darkness hung round, on every side, with the trophies of luxury, drunkenness, and sensuality. So numerous would you find those martyrs of iniquity, that it may safely be asserted, where war or pestilence have slain their thousands, intemperate pleasure has slain its ten thousands.

While the want of moderation in pleasure brings men to an untimely grave, at the same time, until they arrive there, it pursues and afflicts them with evils innumerable. To what cause so much as to this, are owing, faded youth, and premature old age; an enervated body, and an enfeebled mind; together with all that long train of diseases, which the indulgence of appetite and sense have introduced into the world? Health, cheerfulness, and vigour, are known to be the offspring of temperance. The man of moderation brings to all the natural and innocent pleasures of life, that sound, uncorrupted relish, which gives him a much fuller enjoyment of them, than the palled and vitiated appetite of the voluptuary allows him to know. He culls the flower of every allowable gratification, without dwelling upon it until the flavour be lost. He tastes the sweet of every pleasure, without pursuing it till the bitter dregs rise. Whereas the man of opposite character dips so deep, that he never fails to stir an impure and noxious sediment, which lies at the bottom of the cup.—In the pleasures, besides, which are regulated by moderation, there is always that dignity which goes along with innocence. No man needs to be ashamed of them. They are consistent with honour; with the favour of God, and of man. But the sensualist, who disdains all restraint in his pleasures, is odious in the public eye. His vices become gross; his character contemptible; and he ends in being a burden both to himself and to society. Let me exhort you once more,

V. To moderation in all your passions. This exercise of the virtue is the more requisite, because there is no passion in human nature but what has, of itself, a tendency to run into excess. For all passion implies a violent emotion of mind. Of course, it is apt to derange the regular course of our ideas; and to produce confusion

within. Nothing, at the same time, is more seducing than passion. During the time when it grows and swells, it constantly justifies, to our apprehension, the tumult which it creates, by means of a thousand false arguments which it forms, and brings to its aid. Of some passions, such as anger and resentment, the excess is so obviously dangerous, as loudly to call for moderation. He who gives himself up to the impetuosity of such passions, without restraint, is universally condemned by the world; and hardly accounted a man of sound mind. But, what is less apt to be attended to, some even of those passions which are reckoned innocent, or whose tendency to disorder and evil is not apparent, stand, nevertheless, in need of moderation and restraint, as well as others. For such is the feebleness of our nature, that every passion which has for its object any worldly good, is in hazard of attaching us too strongly, and of transporting us beyond the bounds of reason. If allowed to acquire the full and unrestrained dominion of the heart, it is sufficient, in various situations, to render us miserable; and almost in every situation, by its ingrossing power, to render us negligent of duties which, as men or Christians, we are bound to perform.

Of the insidious growth of passion, therefore, we have great reason to beware. We ought always to have at hand considerations, which may assist us in tempering its warmth, and in regaining possession of our souls. Let us be persuaded, that moments of passion are always moments of delusion; that nothing truly is, what it then seems to be; that all the opinions which we then form, are erroneous; and all the judgments which we pass, are extravagant. Let moderation accus-tom us to wait until the fumes of passion be spent; until the mist which it has raised begin to be dissipated. We shall then be able to see where truth and right lie; and reason shall, by degrees, resume the ascendant. On no occasion let us imagine, that strength of mind is shown by violence of passion. This is not the strength of men, but the impetuosity of children. It is the strength of one who is in the delirium of a fever, or under the disease of madness. The strength of such a person is indeed increased. But it is an unnatural strength; which, being under no proper guidance, is directed towards objects that occasion his destruction. True strength of mind is shown in governing and resisting passion, not in giving it scope; in restraining the wild beast within; and acting, on the most trying occasions, according to the dictates of conscience, and temperate reason.

Thus I have pointed out, in several instances, how moderation ought to be displayed: moderation in our wishes; moderation in our pursuits; moderation in our hopes; moderation in our pleasures; moderation in our passions. It is a principle which should habitually influence our conduct, and form the reigning temperature of the soul.

THE great motive to this virtue is suggested by the words immediately following the Text; *the Lord is at hand*. The Judge is coming, who is to close this temporary scene of things, and to introduce a higher state of existence. The day is at hand, which will

place the great concerns of men in a point of view very different from that in which they are at present beheld; will strip the world of its false glory; will detect the vanity of earthly pursuits, and disclose objects which have the proper title to interest a rational mind. Objects acquire power to engage our passions, only in proportion as they are conceived to be great. But great, or little, are no more than terms of comparison. Those things which appear great to one who knows nothing greater, will sink into a diminutive size, when he becomes acquainted with objects of a higher nature. Were it oftener in our thoughts, that *the Lord is at hand*, none of those things which now discompose and agitate worldly men would appear of sufficient magnitude to raise commotion in our breasts. Enlarged views of the future destination of man, and of the place which he may hope to possess in an eternal world, naturally give birth to moderation of mind. They tend to cool all misplaced ardour about the advantages of this state; and to produce that calm and temperate frame of spirit, which becomes men and Christians. They give no ground for entire disregard of earthly concerns. While we are men, we must feel and act as such. But they afford a good reason why they who believe *the Lord to be at hand*, should let their *moderation* appear, and be *known unto all men*.

SERMON XLIII.

ON THE JOY, AND THE BITTERNESS OF THE HEART.

Prov. xiv. 10.

The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger doth not intermeddle with his joy.

IT is well known, that men have always been much inclined to place their happiness in the advantages of fortune, and the distinctions of rank. Hence these have been pursued by the multitude with such avidity, that every principle of honour, probity, and virtue, have been sacrificed to the attainment of them. At the same time, many circumstances might have convinced men, that supposing them to be successful in the pursuit, it by no means followed, that happiness was to be the reward. For if happiness be, in truth, essentially connected with splendid fortune, or exalted rank, how comes it to pass, that many, in the inferiour stations of life, visibly spend their days with more comfort, than they who occupy the higher departments of the world? Why does the beggar sing, while the king is sad? A small measure of reflection on our nature might satisfy us, that there are other principles of happiness or misery, too often overlooked by the world, which immediately affect the heart, and operate there with a greater force and power than any circumstances of rank or fortune. This is the observation of the wise man in the Text; and what I now purpose to illustrate. I shall take a view of the chief

sources of that *bitterness which the heart knoweth*, and of that *joy with which a stranger doth not intermeddle*; and then shall point out the proper improvements to be made of the subject.

If we inquire carefully into the sources of the joy or bitterness of the heart, we shall find that they are chiefly two: that they arise either from a man's own mind and temper; or, from the connexion in which he stands with some of his fellow-creatures. In other words, the circumstances which most essentially affect every man's happiness are, his personal character, and his social feelings.

I. EVERY man's own mind and temper is, necessarily, to himself a source of much inward joy or bitterness. For every man, if we may be allowed the expression, is more connected with himself than with any external object. He is constantly a companion to himself in his own thoughts; and what he meets with there, must, of all things, contribute most to his happiness, or his disquiet. Whatever his condition in the world be, whether high or low, if he find no cause to upbraid himself for his behaviour; if he be satisfied that his conduct proceeds upon a rational plan; if, amidst the failings incident to humanity, his conscience be, in the main, free from reproach, and his mind undisturbed by any dismal presages of futurity; the foundation is laid for a placid and agreeable tenour of life. If to this you add a calm and cheerful temper, not easily fretted or disturbed, not subject to envy, nor prone to violent passion, much of that joy will be produced, which, it is said in the Text, *a stranger intermeddeth not with*. For this is an intrinsic joy, independent of all foreign causes. *The upright man, as it is written, is satisfied from himself*. Undisturbed by the vexations of folly, or the remorse of guilt, his nights will be peaceful, and his days serene. His mind is a kingdom to itself. A good conscience, and good temper, prepare, even in the midst of poverty, *a continual feast*.

But how sadly will the scene be reversed, if the first thoughts which occur to a man concerning himself, shall be of a gloomy and threatening kind; if his temper, instead of calmness and self-enjoyment, shall yield him nothing but disquiet and painful agitation! In any situation of fortune, is it possible for him to be happy, whose mind is in this troubled state? *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmities; but a wounded spirit who can bear?* Vigour of mind may enable a man to sustain many shocks of adversity. In his spirit, as long as it is sound, he can find a resource, when other auxiliaries fail. But if that which should sustain him be enfeebled and broken; if that to which he has recourse for the cure of other sorrows, become itself the wounded part; to what quarter can he turn for relief?

The wounds which the spirit suffers are owing chiefly to three causes: to folly, to passion, or to guilt. They frequently originate from folly; that is, from vain and improper pursuits, which, though not directly criminal, are unsuitable to a man's age, character, or condition, in the world. In consequence of these, he beholds himself degraded and exposed; and suffers the pain of many a mortifying reflection, and many a humbling comparison of himself with others. The distress occasioned by a sense of folly, is aggravated by any

violent passion being allowed to take possession of the heart. Even though it be of the class of those which are reckoned innocent, yet if it have entirely seized and overpowered a man, it destroys his tranquillity, and brings his mind into a perturbed state. But if it be a passion of the black and vicious kind, it is sufficient to blast the most flourishing condition, and to poison all his joys. If to those wounds inflicted by folly, or by passion, you add the wound of guilt, the remorse and fear produced by criminal deeds, you fill up the measure of pain and bitterness of heart. Often have the terrors of conscience occasioned inward paroxysms, or violent agitations of mind. A dark and threatening cloud seems, to the conscious sinner, to be hanging over his head. He who believes himself despised, or hated, by men, and who dreads at the same time an avenging God, can derive little pleasure from the external comforts of life. The bitterness of his heart infuses itself into every draught which pleasure offers to his lips.

The external misfortunes of life, disappointments, poverty, and sickness, are nothing in comparison of those inward distresses of mind, occasioned by folly, by passion, and by guilt. They may indeed prevail in different degrees, according as one or other of those principles of bitterness is predominant. But they are seldom parted far asunder from one another; and when, as it too often happens, all the three are complicated, they complete the misery of man. The disorders of the mind, having then arisen to their height, become of all things the most dreadful. The shame of folly, the violence of passion, and the remorse of guilt, acting in conjunction, have too frequently driven men to the last and abhorred refuge, of seeking relief in death from a life too embittered to be any longer endured. I proceed to consider,

II. OTHER troubles and other joys of the heart, arising from sources different from those that I have now described; founded in the relations or connexions which we have with others, and springing from the feelings which these occasion. Such causes of sorrow or joy are of an external nature. Religion does not teach that all the sources of inward pleasure or pain are derived from our temper and moral behaviour. These are indeed the principal springs of bitterness or joy. In one way or other, they affect all the pleasures and pains of life; but they include not, within themselves, the whole of them. Our Creator did not intend, that the happiness of each individual should have no dependence on those who are around him. Having connected us in society by many ties, it is his decree, that these ties should prove, both during their subsistence and in their dissolution, causes of pleasure or pain, immediately, and often deeply, affecting the human heart. My doctrine, therefore, is not, that *the bitterness which the heart knoweth as its own*, and *the joy with which a stranger intermeddleth not*, is independent of every thing external. What I assert is, that this *bitterness* and this *joy* depend much more on other causes, than on riches or poverty, on high or low stations in the world; that, equally in the conditions of elevated fortune and of private life, the most material circumstances of trouble or felicity, next

to the state of our own mind and temper, are the sensations and affections which arise from the connexions we have with others.

In order to make this appear, let us suppose a man in any rank or condition of life, happy in his family and his friends; soothed by the cordial intercourse of kind affections, which he partakes with them; enjoying the comfort of doing them good offices, and receiving in return their sincerest gratitude; experiencing no jealousy nor envy, no disquiet or alienation of affection, among those with whom he is connected; — how many, and how copious sources of inward joy open to such a man! How smooth is the tenour of a life that proceeds in such a course! What a smiling aspect does the love of parents and children, of brothers and sisters, of friends and relations, give to every surrounding object, and every returning day! With what a lustre does it gild even the small habitation where such placid intercourse dwells; where such scenes of heartfelt satisfaction succeed uninterruptedly to one another!

But let us suppose this joyful intercourse to be broken off, in an untimely hour, by the cruel hand of the last foe; let us imagine the family, once so happy among themselves, to behold the parent, the child, or the spouse, to whom their hearts were attached by the tenderest ties, stretched on the cold bed of death; then, what bitterness does the heart know! This, in the strictest sense, is its *own bitterness*; from which it is not in the power of any external circumstance whatever to afford it relief. Amidst those piercing griefs of the heart, all ranks of life are levelled; all distinctions of fortune are forgotten. Unavailing are the trophies of splendid woe, with which riches deck the fatal couch, to give the least comfort to the mourner. The prince, and the peasant, then equally feel their own bitterness. Dwelling on the melancholy remembrance of joys that are past and gone, the one forgets his poverty, the other despises the gilded trappings of his state; both, in that sad hour, are fully sensible, that on the favours of fortune it depends not to make man happy in this world.

But it is not only the death of friends, which, in the midst of a seemingly prosperous state, is able to bring distress home to the heart. From various failures in their conduct when living, arises much of the inward uneasiness we suffer. It will, in general, be found, that the behaviour of those among whom we live in near connexion, is, next to personal character and temper, the chief source, either of the pleasures, or of the disquietudes, of every man's life. As when their behaviour is cordial and satisfactory, it is of all external things the most soothing to the mind; so, on the other hand, their levity, their inattention, or occasional harshness, even though it proceed to no decided breach of friendship, yet ruffles and frets the temper. Social life, harassed with those petty vexations, resembles a road which a man is doomed daily to travel; but finds it rugged, and stony, and painful to be trod.

The case becomes much worse, if the base and criminal conduct of persons whom we have once loved, dissolve all the bonds of amity, and show that our confidence has been abused. Then are opened some of the deepest springs of bitterness in the human heart. — Be-

hold the heart of the parent, torn by the unworthy behaviour and cruel ingratitude of the child, whom he had trained up with the fondest hopes; on whom he had lavished his whole affection; and for whose sake he had laboured and toiled, through the course of a long life. Behold the endearments of the conjugal state changed into black suspicion, and mistrust; the affectionate spouse, or the virtuous husband, left to mourn, with a broken heart, the infidelity of the once-beloved partner of their life. Behold the unsuspecting friend betrayed, in the hour of danger, by the friend in whom he trusted; or, in the midst of severe misfortune, meeting nothing but cold indifference, perhaps scorn and contempt, where he had expected to find the kindest sympathy. — Are these, let me ask, uncommon scenes in the world? Are such distresses peculiar to any rank or station? Do they chiefly befall persons in humble life, and have the great any prerogative which affords them exemption? When the heart is sorely wounded by the ingratitude or faithlessness of those on whom it had leaned with the whole weight of affection, where shall it turn for relief? Will it find comfort in the recollection of honours and titles, or in the contemplation of surrounding treasures? — Talk not of the honours of a court. Talk not of the wealth of the East. These, in the hours of heart-bitterness, are spurned, as contemptible and vile; perhaps cursed, as indirect causes of the present distress. The dart has made its way to the heart. There, there it is fixed. The very seat of feeling is assailed; and in proportion to the sensibility of the sufferer's heart, and the tenderness of his affections, such, unfortunately, will be his degree of anguish. A good conscience, and hope in God, may indeed bring him consolation. But under such distresses of the heart as I have described, fortune, be it as flourishing as you will, is no more than an empty pageant. It is a feeble reed, which affords no support. It is a house of straw, which is scattered before the wind.

Thus you see this doctrine meeting us, from many quarters, that the heart knows a bitterness and joy of its own, altogether distinct from the uneasiness or the pleasure that is produced by the circumstances of external fortune; arising either from personal character, and the state of a man's own mind; or from the affections excited by the relations in which he stands to others. This joy and this bitterness are, each of them, of so much greater consequence than any distinctions of fortune, that, blessed with the former, one may be happy, as far as human happiness goes, in a cottage; and afflicted with the latter, he must be miserable in a palace. — Let us now proceed to an important part of the subject, the practical improvement to which this doctrine leads.

First, Let it serve to moderate our passion for riches, and high situations in the world. It is well known, that the eager pursuit of these is the chief incentive to the crimes that fill the world. Hence, among the middle and lower ranks of men, all the fraud, falsehood, and treachery, with which the competition for gain infests society. Hence, in the higher stations of the world, all the atrocious crimes flowing from ambition, and the love of power, by which the peace

of mankind has so often been broken, and the earth stained with blood. Had these coveted advantages the power, when obtained, of ensuring joy to the heart, and rendering it a stranger to bitterness, some apology might be offered for the violence to which they have given occasion. The prize might be supposed worthy of being acquired at a high expence, when so much depended on the attainment. But I have shown, I hope with satisfactory evidence, that the contrary is the truth. I say not, that the advantages of fortune deserve no regard from a wise, or a good man. Poverty is always distressing. Opulence and rank are both attended with many comforts, and may be rendered subservient to the most valuable purposes. But what I say is, that it is a great error to rate them beyond their just value. Secondary advantages, inferiour assistances to felicity, they are; and no more. They rank below every thing that immediately affects the heart, and that is a native source of joy or bitterness there. If a man be either unhappy in his dispositions, or unhappy in all his connexions, you heap upon him, in vain, all the treasures, and all the honours, which kings can bestow. Divest these things, then, of that false glare which the opinions of the multitude throw around them. Contemplate them with a more impartial eye. Pursue them with less eagerness. Above all, never sacrifice to the pursuit any degree of probity or moral worth, of candour or good affection; if you would not lay a foundation for that bitterness of heart, which none of the goods of fortune can either compensate or cure.

SECONDLY, Let the observations which have been made, correct our mistakes, and check our complaints, concerning a supposed promiscuous distribution of happiness in this world. The charge of injustice, which so often, on this account, hath been brought against Providence, rests entirely on this ground, that the happiness and misery of men may be estimated by the degree of their external prosperity. This is the delusion under which the multitude have always laboured; but which a just consideration of the invisible springs of happiness that affect the heart is sufficient to correct. If you would judge whether a man be really happy, it is not solely to his houses and his lands, to his equipage and his retinue, you are to look. Unless you could see farther, and discern what joy, or what bitterness, his heart feels, you can pronounce nothing concerning him. That proud and wicked man whom you behold surrounded with state and splendour, and upon whom you think the favours of Heaven so improperly lavished, may be a wretch, pining away in secret, with a thousand griefs unknown to the world. That poor man, who appears neglected and overlooked, may, in his humble station, be partaking of all the moral, and all the social joys, that exhilarate the heart; may be living cheerful, contented, and happy. Cease then to murmur against dispensations of Providence, which are, to us, so imperfectly known. Envy not the prosperity of sinners. Judge not of the real condition of men, from what floats merely on the surface of their state. Let us rather,

THIRDLY, Turn our attention to those internal sources of happi-

ness or misery, on which it hath been shown that so much depends. As far as the bitterness or joy of the heart arises from the first of those great springs which I assigned to it, our own conduct and temper, so far our happiness is placed, in some measure, in our own hands. What is a miss or disordered within, in consequence of folly, of passion, or guilt, may be rectified by due care, under the assistance of Divine grace. He who thereby attains to a tranquil and composed state of heart, free from ill-humour and disgust, from violent passions, and from vexing remorse, is laying a foundation for enjoyment of himself, much surer and broader than if he were amassing thousands to increase his estate.

With regard to the other spring of joy or bitterness of heart, arising from our connexions with others, here, indeed, we are more dependent on things not within our power. These connexions are not always of our own forming; and even when they have been formed by choice, the wisest are liable to be disappointed in their expectations. Yet here too it will be found, that the proper regulation of the heart is of the utmost importance, both for improving the joys which our situation affords, and for mitigating the griefs which our connexions may render unavoidable. As far as the choice of friends or relatives depends on ourselves, let their virtue and worth ever direct that choice, if we look for any lasting felicity from it. In all the habits and attachments of social life, after they are formed, let it be our study, to fulfil properly our own part. Let nothing be wanting on our side, to nourish that mutual harmony and affectionate friendship which, in every situation of life, as has been shown, is of so great consequence to our peace and satisfaction. It is not, indeed, in our power to preserve always alive those friends, in whom our hearts delight. It is often not in our power to prevent the ingratitude and unworthy behaviour of other friends, from whom we once expected comfort. But under those afflicting incidents of life, much may be done by proper employment of the thoughts, and direction of the affections, for obtaining relief. To a purified and well-regulated heart, reason and religion can bring many aids for healing its wounds, and restoring its peace; aids which, to the negligent and vicious, are wholly unknown. The greater experience we have of the vicissitudes of human life, with more weight will that precept of the wise man always come home to our remembrance; *Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.** — Hence arises,

In the fourth and last place, another instruction, that is of the utmost importance to us all, frequently to look up to Him who made the human heart; and to implore his assistance in the regulation and government of it. Known to Him are all the sources of bitterness and joy by which it is affected. On Him it depends, to let them forth, or to shut them up; to increase, or to diminish them, at his pleasure. In a study so infinitely important to happiness, as that of the preservation of inward peace, we cannot be too earnest in beseeching aid from the great Father of Spirits, to enable us to keep our hearts free from distress and trouble. — Besides the assistance which

* Prov. iv. 23.

we may hope to derive from Divine grace, the employments of devotion themselves form one of the most powerful means of composing and tranquillising the heart. On various occasions, when the sources of heart-bitterness have been most overflowing, devotion has been found the only refuge of the sufferer. Devotion opens a sanctuary, to which they whose hearts have been most deeply wounded, can always fly. Within that quiet and sacred retreat, they have often found a healing balsam prepared. When grieved by men, they have derived, from the ascent of the mind towards God and celestial objects, much to sooth them at present, and much to hope for in future. Let us, therefore, neglect no mean with which religion can furnish us, for promoting the joys, and assuaging the bitterness, of the heart. Amidst the frailties of our nature, the inconstancy of men, and the frequent changes of human life, we shall find every assistance that can be procured, little enough, for enabling us to pass our few days with tolerable comfort and peace.

SERMON XLIV.

ON CHARACTERS OF IMPERFECT GOODNESS.

MARK, x. 21.

Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him.

THE characters of men which the world presents to us are infinitely diversified. In some, either the good or the bad qualities are so predominant, as strongly to mark the character; to discriminate one person as a virtuous, another as a vicious man. In others, these qualities are so mixed together, as to leave the character doubtful. The light and the shade are so much blended, the colours of virtue and vice run in such a manner into one another, that we can hardly distinguish where the one ends, and the other begins; and we remain in suspense whether to blame or to praise. While we admire those who are thoroughly good, and detest the grossly wicked, it is proper also to bestow attention on those imperfect characters, where there may be much to praise, and somewhat to blame; and where regard to the commendable part shall not hinder us from remarking what is defective or faulty. Such attentions will be found the more useful, as characters of this mixed sort are, more frequently than any other, exhibited to us in the commerce of society.

It was one of this sort, which gave occasion to the incident recorded in the Text. The incident seems to have been considered remarkable, since it is recounted by three of the evangelical writers; and by them all, with nearly the same circumstances. The person to whom the history relates was a ruler; one of higher rank and station than those who usually resorted to Jesus. He was a rich man; He was a young man. His whole behaviour was prepossessing and engaging. He appears to have conceived a high opinion

of our Lord. He addressed him with the utmost respect; and the question which he put to him was proper and important. *He kneeled to him, and said, Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?* His conduct in the world had been regular and decent. He could protest that he had hitherto kept himself free from any gross vice; and, in his dealings with others, had observed the precepts of God. Our Lord, *beholding him*, is said to have *loved him*; whence we have reason to conclude, that he was not hypocritical in his professions; and that his countenance carried the expression of good dispositions, as his speech and his manners were altogether complacent and gentle. Yet this person, amiable as he was, when his virtue was put to the test, disappointed the hopes which he had given reason to form. Attached, in all probability, to the indulgence of ease and pleasure, he wanted fortitude of mind to part with the advantages of the world, for the sake of religion. When our Lord required him to fulfil his good intentions, by relinquishing his fortune, becoming one of his followers, and preparing himself to encounter sufferings, the sacrifice appeared to him too great. Impressions of virtue, however, still remained on his mind. He was sensible of what he ought to have done; and regretted his want of courage to do it. *He was sorrowful: He was grieved: Yet he went away.*

PERSONS of a character somewhat resembling this, all of us may have met with; especially among the young; among those who have been liberally educated, and polished by a good society. They abhor open vice, and crimes that disturb the world. They have a respect for religion. They are willing to receive instruction for their conduct. They are modest and unassuming; respectful to their superiours in age or station; gentle in their address; inoffensive and courteous in their whole behaviour. They are fond of obliging every one; unwilling to hurt or displease any.—Such persons we cannot but love. We gladly promise well of them; and are disposed to forward and assist them: Yet such is the weakness of our nature, that at the bottom of this character there may lie, as we see exemplified in the instance before us, some secret and material defects. That vigour of mind, that firmness of principle, may be wanting, which is requisite for enabling them to act with propriety, when their virtue is put to a decisive trial. The softness of their nature is unfavourable to a steady perseverance in the course of integrity. They possess the amiable qualities; but there is ground to suspect, that in the estimable ones they are deficient. While, therefore, we by no means class them among the bad, we dare not give them the full praise of virtue. When they set out in the world, we cannot pronounce with confidence, what confirmed features their character will assume; nor how far they can be depended upon in future. Allow me now to point out the dangers which such persons are most likely to incur; and to show what is requisite for them farther to study, in order to their fulfilling the part of good men and true Christians.

I. PERSONS of this description are not qualified for discharging

aright many duties, to which their situation in life may call them. In certain circumstances, they behave with abundance of propriety. When all is calm and smooth around them; when nothing occurs to agitate the mind, or to disturb the tenour of placid life, none of their defects come forward. They are beloved; and they are useful. They promote the comfort of human society; and, by gentleness and courtesy of manners, serve to cement men together in agreeable union. But to sail on the tranquil surface of an unruffled lake, and to steer a safe course through a troubled and stormy ocean, require different talents; and, alas! human life oftener resembles the stormy ocean, than the unruffled lake. We shall not have been long embarked, without finding the resemblance to hold too closely.

Amidst the bustle of the world, amidst the open contentions and secret enmities which prevail in every society, mildness and gentleness alone are not sufficient to carry us with honour through the duties of our different stations; as heads of families, citizens, subjects, magistrates, or as engaged in the pursuits of our several callings. Disturbances and trials arise, which demand vigorous exertions of all the moral powers; of patience, vigilance, and self-denial; of constancy and fortitude, to support us under danger and reproach; of temperance, to restrain us from being carried away by pleasure; of firm and determined principle, to make us despise the bribes of sin. These manly dispositions of mind are indispensably necessary to prepare one for surmounting the discouragements of virtue, and for struggling honourably through the hardships of life. Unless he be thus armed and fortified, whatever good intentions have been in his heart, they are likely to be frustrated in action. Nothing that is great, can be undertaken. Nothing that is difficult or hazardous, can be accomplished. Nor are we to imagine, that it is only in times of persecution, or war, or civil commotions, that there is occasion for those stronger efforts, those masculine virtues of the soul, to be displayed. The private, and seemingly quiet, stations of life, often call men forth, in the days of peace, to severe trial of firmness and constancy. The life of very few proceeds in so uniform a train, as not to oblige them to discover, in some situation or other, what portion they possess of the estimable qualities of man. Hence it sometimes happens, that persons whose manners were much less promising and engaging than those of others, have, nevertheless, when brought to act a part in critical circumstances, performed that part with more unsullied honour, and firmer integrity, than they.

II. PERSONS of the character I have described are ill-fitted, not only for discharging the higher duties of life, but also for resisting the common temptations to vice. With good dispositions in their mind, with a desire, like the young ruler in the Text, to know what they shall do in order to *inherit eternal life*; yet, when the terms required of them interfere with any favourite enjoyment, like him, they are *sorrowful, and go away*. The particular trial to which he was put, may appear to be a hard one, and to exceed the ordinary rate of

virtue. Our Lord, who discerned his heart, saw it to be necessary, in his case, for bringing his character to the test. But in cases, where trials of much less difficulty present themselves, they who partake of a character similar to his, are often found to give way. The good qualities which they possess, border on certain weaknesses of the mind; and these weaknesses are apt to betray them insensibly into vices, with which they are connected.

Good-nature, for instance, is in danger of running into that unlimited complaisance, which assimilates men to the loose manners of those whom they find around them. Pliant, and yielding in their temper, they have not force to stand by the decisions of their own minds, with regard to right and wrong. Like the animal which is said to assume the colour of every object to which it is applied, they lose all proper character of their own; and are formed by the characters of those with whom they chance to associate. The mild are apt to sink into habits of indolence and sloth. The cheerful and gay, when warmed by pleasure and mirth, lose that sobriety and self-denial, which is essential to the support of virtue. — Even modesty and submission, qualities so valuable in themselves, and so highly ornamental to youth, sometimes degenerate into a vicious timidity; a timidity which restrains men from doing their duty with firmness; which cannot stand the frown of the great, the reproach of the multitude, or even the ridicule and sneer of the scorner.

Nothing can be more amiable than a constant desire to please, and an unwillingness to offend or hurt. Yet, in characters where this is a predominant feature, defects are often found. Fond always to oblige, and afraid to utter any disagreeable truth, such persons are sometimes led to dissemble. Their love of truth is sacrificed to their love of pleasing. Their speech, and their manners, assume a studied courtesy. You cannot always depend on their smile; nor, when they promise, be sure of the performance. They mean and intend well; but the good intention is temporary. Like wax, they yield easily to every impression; and the transient friendship contracted with one person, is effaced by the next. Undistinguishing desire to oblige, often proves, in the present state of human things, a dangerous habit. They who cannot, on many occasions, give a firm and steady denial, or who cannot break off a connexion, which has been hastily and improperly formed, stand on the brink of many mischiefs. They will be seduced by the corrupting, ensnared by the artful, betrayed by those in whom they had placed their trust. Unsuspicious themselves, they were flattered with the belief of having many friends around them. Elated with sanguine hopes, and cheerful spirits, they reckoned, that *to-morrow would be as this day, and more abundant*. Injudicious liberality, and thoughtless profusion, are the consequence; until, in the end, the straits to which they are reduced, bring them into mean or dishonourable courses. Through innocent, but unguarded weakness, and from want of the severer virtues, they are, in process of time, betrayed into downright crimes. Such may be the conclusion of those, who, like the young ruler

before us, with many amiable and promising dispositions, had begun their career in life.

III. SUCH persons are not prepared for sustaining, with propriety and dignity, the distresses to which our state is liable. They were equipped for the season of sunshine and serenity; but when the sky is overcast, and the days of darkness come, their feeble minds are destitute of shelter, and ill-provided for defence. Then is the time, when more hardy qualities are required; when courage must face danger, constancy support pain, patience possess itself in the midst of discouragements, magnanimity display its contempt of threatenings. If those high virtues be altogether strangers to the mind, the mild and gentle will certainly sink under the torrent of disasters. — The ruler in the Text could plead, that his behaviour to others, in the course of social life, had been unexceptionable. So far, the reflection on his conduct would afford him comfort amidst adversity. But no man is without failings. In the dejecting season of trouble it will occur to every one, that he has been guilty of frequent transgression; that much of what ought to have been done, was neglected; and that much of what has been done, had better have been omitted. In such situations, when a thousand apprehensions arise to alarm conscience, nothing is able to quiet its uneasiness, except a well-grounded trust in the mercy and acceptance of Heaven. It is firm religious principle, acting upon a manly and enlightened mind, that gives dignity to the character, and composure to the heart, under all the troubles of the world. This enables the brave and virtuous man with success to buffet the storm. While he, who had once sparkled in society with all the charms of gay vivacity, and had been the delight of every circle in which he was engaged, remains dispirited, overwhelmed, and annihilated, in the evil day.

SUCH are the failings incident to persons of mixed and imperfect goodness; such the defects of a character formed merely of the amiable, without the estimable qualities of man.

It appears from this, that we must not place too much trust in the fair appearances, which a character may at first exhibit. In judging of others, let us always think the best, and employ the spirit of charity and candour. But in judging of ourselves, we ought to be more severe. Let us remember him whom our Lord beheld, and *loved*; and who yet fell short of the kingdom of heaven. Let us not forget, that something more than gentleness and modesty, than complacency of temper and affability of manners, is requisite to form a worthy man, or a true Christian. To a high place in our esteem, these qualities are justly entitled. They enter essentially into every good man's character. They form some of its most favourable distinctions. But they constitute a part of it; not the whole. Let us not, therefore, rest on them entirely, when we conceive an idea of what manner of persons we ought to be.

LET piety form the basis of firm and established virtue. If this be wanting, the character cannot be sound and entire. Moral virtue will always be endangered, often be overthrown, when it is separated from its surest support. Confidence in God, strengthened by faith

in the great Redeemer of mankind, not only amidst the severer trials of virtue, gives constancy to the mind; but, by nourishing the hope of immortality, adds warmth and elevation to the affections. They whose conduct is not animated by religious principle, are deprived of the most powerful incentive to worthy and honourable deeds.

Let such discipline, next, be studied, as may form us to the active and manly virtues. To natural good affections, we can never entirely trust our conduct. These, as has been shown, may sometimes be warped into what is wrong; and often will prove insufficient for carrying us rightly through all the duties of life. Good affections are highly valuable; but they must be supported by fixed principles, cultivated in the understanding, and rooted in the heart. Habits must be acquired of temperance and self-denial, that we may be able to resist pleasure, and endure pain, when either of them interfere with our duty; that we may be prepared to make a sacrifice of any worldly interest, when the voice of God and conscience demand it. Let us always remember, that without fortitude of mind there is no manhood; there can be no perseverance in virtue. Let a sacred and inviolable regard for truth reign in our whole behaviour. Let us be distinguished for fidelity to every promise we have made; and for constancy in every worthy friendship we have formed. Let no weak complaisance, no undue regard to the opinions of men, ever make us betray the rights of conscience. What we have once, upon due consideration, adopted as rules of conduct, to these let us adhere unshaken. However the world may change around us, let it find us the same in prosperity and adversity; faithful to God and virtue; faithful to the convictions of our own heart. What our lot in the world may be, is not ours to foresee or determine. But it is ours to resolve, that, whatever it shall be, it shall find us persevering in one line of uprightness and honour.

By such discipline, such attentions as these, we are to guard against those failings, which are sometimes found to stain the most engaging characters. Joining in proper union the amiable and the estimable qualities, by the one we shall attract the good; and by the other, command respect from the bad. We shall both secure our own integrity, and shall exhibit to others a proper view of what virtue is, in its native grace and majesty. In one part of our character, we shall resemble the flower that smiles in spring; in another, the firmly rooted tree, that braves the winter storm. For remember we must, that there is a season of winter, as well as of spring and summer, in human life; and it concerns us to be equally prepared for both.

A HIGHER and more perfect example of such a character as I now recommend, cannot be found, than what is presented to us in the life of Jesus Christ. In him we behold all that is gentle, united with all that is respectable. It is a remarkable expression, which the Apostle Paul employs concerning him; *I beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ.** Well might these qualities be singled out, as those for which he was known and distinguished. We see him in his whole behaviour affable, courteous, and easy of access. He con-

* 2 Cor. x. 1.

versed familiarly with all who presented themselves; and despised not the meanest. With all the infirmities of his disciples he calmly bore; and his rebukes were mild, when their provocations were great. He wept over the calamities of his country, which persecuted him; and apologised and prayed for them who put him to death. Yet the same Jesus we behold, awful in the strictness of his virtue; inflexible in the cause of truth; uncomplying with prevailing manners, when he found them corrupt; setting his face boldly against the hypocritical leaders of the people; overawed by none of their threatenings; in the most indignant terms reproving their vices, and stigmatising their characters. We behold him gentle, without being tame; firm, without being stern; courageous, without being violent. *Let this mind be in us, which was also in Jesus Christ*; and we shall attain to honour both with God and with man.

SERMON XLV.

ON THE SACRAMENT OF THE LORD'S SUPPER, AS A PREPARATION FOR DEATH.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

MATTHEW, xxvi. 29.

But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.

WITH these words of our Blessed Lord, the Evangelist concludes his account of the institution of the Sacrament of the Supper. It is an institution which, solemn and venerable in itself, is rendered still more so by the circumstances which accompanied it. Our Lord had now, for about three years, continued to appear in his public character in the land of Judea. He had, all along, been watched with a jealous eye by his enemies; and the time was come when they were to prevail against him. A few friends he had, from the beginning, selected, who, in every vicissitude of his state, remained faithfully attached to him. With these friends he was now meeting for the last time, on the very evening in which he was betrayed and seized. He perfectly knew all that was to befall him. He knew that this was the last meal in which he was to join with those who had been the companions of all his labours, the confidants of all his griefs; among whom he had passed all the quiet and private moments of his life. He knew that within a few hours he was to be torn from this loved society, by a band of ruffians; and by to-morrow, was to be publicly arraigned as a malefactor. With a heart melting with tenderness, he said to the twelve Apostles, as he sat down with them at table, *With desire I have desired to eat this passover with you before I suffer.** And then, having gratified himself for the last time in their society, and having instituted that commemoration of his death, which

* Luke, xxii. 15.

was to continue in the Christian church until the end of ages, he took a solemn and affectionate farewell of his friends, in the words of the Text; *I say unto you, that I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom.*

As these words were uttered by our Lord, in the prospect of his sufferings; when preparing himself for death, and looking forward to a future meeting with his friends in heaven; let us, under this view, consider the sacrament, which he then instituted, as a preparation for all the sufferings of life, and, especially, a preparation for death. It is fit and proper, that such solemn prospects should enter into the service which we are this day to perform. We have no reason to imagine, that they will render it a gloomy service. A good and wise man is often disposed to look forward to the termination of life. The number of our days is determined by God; and certainly it will not tend to shorten their number, that we employ ourselves in preparing for death. On the contrary, while our days last, it will tend to make us pass them more comfortably, and more wisely. Let us now, then, as if for the last time we were to partake of this sacrament, consider how it may serve to prepare us for the dying hour.

I. It is a high exercise of all those dispositions and affections, in which a good man would wish to die. He would surely wish to leave this world in the spirit of devotion towards God, and of fellowship and charity with all his brethren on earth. Now these are the very sentiments, which the sacrament of the Lord's Supper inspires into the heart of every pious communicant. It includes the highest acts of devotion of which human nature is capable. It imports a lively sense of the infinite mercies of Heaven; of the gratitude we owe to that God, who, by the death of his Son, hath restored the forfeited happiness and hopes of the human race. It imports, the consecration of the soul to God; the entire resignation of ourselves, and all our concerns, into his hands; as to the God whom we serve and love; the guardian in whom we confide. *To thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. I will go to the altar of God, to God my exceeding joy. I will come into thy house in the multitude of thy mercy; and in thy fear I will worship towards thy holy temple.**

These devout affections towards God are, on this occasion, necessarily accompanied with benevolent dispositions toward men. Our communion is not only with God, but with one another. In this solemn service, the distinction of ranks is abolished. We assemble in common before our great Lord, professing ourselves to be all members of his family, and children of the same Father. No feud, nor strife, nor enmity, is permitted to approach the sacred table. All within that hallowed space breathes peace, and concord, and love. *If thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.†* What can be more becoming men and Christians, than such sentiments of piety to the great Father of the universe; gratitude to the merciful Redeemer of mankind; and charity and forgiveness to-

* Psalm xliii. 4. — v. 7.

† Matt. v. 23, 24.

wards all our brethren? Is not this the temper in which a good man would wish to live; more especially is not this the frame of mind which will give both dignity and peace to his last moments? How discomposed and enbittered will these important moments prove, if with a mind soured by the remembrance of unforgiven injuries, with a breast rankled by enmity, with a heart alienated from God, and insensible to devotion, one be forced away from life?

CONTEMPLATE the manner in which our Blessed Lord died; which the service of this day brings particularly into your view. You behold him, amidst the extremity of pain, calm and collected within himself; possessing his spirit with all the serenity which sublime devotion and exalted benevolence inspire. You hear him, first, lamenting the fate of his unhappy country; next, when he was fastened to the cross, addressing words of consolation to his afflicted parent; and, lastly, sending up prayers, mixed with compassionate apologies for those who were shedding his blood. After all those exercises of charity, you behold him, in an act of devout adoration and trust, resigning his breath: *Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.*—Can any death be pronounced unhappy, how distressful soever its circumstances may be, which is thus supported and dignified? What could we wish for more in our last moments, than with this peaceful frame of mind, this calm of all the affections, this exaltation of heart towards God, this diffusion of benevolence towards men, to bid adieu to the world?

If, in such a spirit as this, we would all wish to die, let us think that now is the time to prepare for it, by seasonably cultivating this spirit while we live; by imbibing, in particular, from the holy sacrament, those dispositions and affections which we would wish to possess at our latest period. It is altogether vain to imagine, that when the hour of death approaches, we shall be able to form ourselves into the frame of mind which is then most proper and decent. Amidst the struggles of nature, and under the load of sickness or pain, it is not time for unaccustomed exertions to be made, or for new reformations to be begun. *Sufficient, and more than sufficient, for that day is the evil thereof.* It will be too late to assume then the hero, or the saint, if we have been totally unacquainted with the character before. The sentiments we would display and the language we would utter, will be alien and strange to us. They will be forced and foreign to the heart. It is only in consequence of habits acquired in former and better days, that a temper of piety and charity can grow up into such strength, as to confer peace and magnanimity on the concluding hours of life. Peculiarly favourable to the acquisition of such a temper, are the devotions of this day. In this view, let us perform them; and study to be, at the table of the Lord, what we would wish to be when the summons of death shall come.

II. This sacrament becomes a preparation for death, by laying a foundation for peace with God. What is important at the close of life, is not only the temper in which we leave the world, but the situation in which we stand with respect to that great Judge, before whom we are about to appear. This view of our situation is apt to

escape us, during the ordinary course of life. Occupied with the affairs and concerns of this world; flattered by those illusive colours of innocence and virtue, in which self-love dresses up our character, apprehensions of guilt create little uneasiness to the multitude of men. But, on the approach of death, their ideas change. As the inquisition of the Supreme Judge draws nigh, remembered transgressions crowd upon the mind. Guilt becomes strongly realized to the imagination; and alarms, before unknown, begin to arise. Hence that anxiety, in the prospect of a future invisible world, which is so often seen to attend the bed of death. Hence those various methods which superstition has devised for quieting this anxiety; the trembling mind eagerly grasping every feeble plank on which it can lay hold, and flying for protection to the most unavailing aid. The stoutest spirits have been then known to bend; the proudest hearts to be humbled. They who are now most thoughtless about their spiritual concerns, may, perhaps, be in this state before they die.

The dispensation of grace discovered in the Gospel, affords the only remedy against those terrors, by the promise of pardon, extended to the penitent, through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is the very essence of this sacrament, to exhibit this promised grace to mankind; *My body which was broken for you; my blood shed for many for the remission of sins.* Here shines from above the ray of hope. Divine justice, we are assured, is not inexorable. Divine mercy is accessible to all who believe and repent. The participation of this sacrament, therefore, naturally imparts comfort to the worthy communicant; as it supposes, on his part, a cordial compliance with those terms, on which pardon is offered by the Gospel to mankind.

I mean not to say, that the participation of this sacrament, however pious and proper soever our dispositions at that time may be, is, of itself, sufficient to ensure us of comfort at death. It were unwarrantable to flatter Christians with hopes to this extent. No single act of the most fervent devotion can afford assured hopes of peace with Heaven, until these hopes be confirmed by the succeeding tenour of a good life. But what may safely be asserted is, that communicating in a proper manner makes way for such hopes. It is an introduction to that state of reconciliation with God, which will give you peace in death. It is the beginning of a good course, which, if duly pursued, will make your latter end blessed. It is the entrance of *the path of the just*; the morning of that *light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day.* For this holy sacrament is a professed renunciation of the vices and corruptions of the world. It is a professed dereliction of former evil habits; a solemn return, on our part, to God and virtue, under the firm trust, that God will, through Jesus Christ, show mercy to the frailties of the penitent. If you continue to support the character which you this day assume, the invisible world will no longer present to you a scene of terrors. You will be comforted with the view of goodness and compassion, as predominant in the administration of the universe. After having finished a virtuous course, you will be able to look up to that God whom you have worshipped, and to say, *I know in whom I have trusted. Though I*

walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff shall comfort me.

III. THIS sacrament prepares us for a happy death, by strengthening the connexion between Christians and Christ their Saviour. This is a connexion which, in various ways, redounds to their benefit; and will be found particularly consolatory at the hour of death. The awful Majesty of Heaven is in danger of overwhelming the mind, in the feeble moments of departing life. The reverence it inspires is mingled with sensations of dread, which might be too strong for us then to bear. When we look up to it, through a Mediator and Intercessor, that Majesty assumes a milder aspect, and appears to invite our approach. Whatever, therefore, forms a connexion with this great Mediator, this powerful friend and patron of the human race, must be most desirable to every one, especially to the dying man. Now, this sacrament unites us closely with him. It is the oath of our allegiance. It is the act of enlisting ourselves under the banner of this Divine Leader. Of course it strengthens our faith in him, as our guide through life, and our guardian and protector in death. It gives us a title to look up to him, under the confidence of that reciprocal engagement, which fidelity on the one hand is always understood to imply, of protection on the other.

His participation of our nature conveys a degree of encouragement, which we could derive from no being altogether celestial, how gracious or benign soever. In our utmost extremity, we can have recourse to his sympathising aid, who had experience both of the distresses of life, and of the terrors of death. We behold, in the Text, with what firm tranquillity he looked forward to his approaching sufferings. Sincere attachment to our great Master, may be expected to infuse into us some degree of the same happy composure of mind. It is owing to our losing out of view this perfect model; to our following the crowd, and adopting the common spirit of the world, that we become mean-spirited and base; servilely attached to life, and afraid to die. Did we, according to our engagements at the Lord's table, keep our eye fixed on our Divine Leader, and study to follow his steps, a portion of his spirit would descend upon us at the hour of death. It would be as the mantle of Elijah, falling on a chosen disciple; and would enable us, as it did Elisha of old, to smite and divide the waters.—We believe our Saviour now to rule in the world of spirits. The grave, therefore, bars not his followers from access to him. In the grave, for our sake, he once lay down, that he might dispel the gloom which appears to us to cover that formidable mansion. In a short time, he rose from it, in order to assure us, that the dark and narrow house was not to confine his followers for ever. By his death, he conquered death, and him that had the power of it; and his voice to us is, *Because I live, ye shall live also.* Hence, as long as we preserve that attachment to him which we this day profess, we are furnished with a variety of considerations proper for supporting us in the prospect of our dissolution. — This leads me to observe,

IV. THAT the sacrament of which we are to partake, prepares us

for death, by confirming and enlivening our hope of immortality. In this sacrament, my friends, you act for both worlds. As inhabitants of the earth, you are on this day to look forward, with care, to your future behaviour in it. For you are not, by any means, disengaging yourselves totally from this life and its concerns. On the contrary, you are forming, and even strengthening, those connexions, which virtue requires you to maintain with your friends and fellow-creatures around you. — At the same time, you are not to consider yourselves as citizens of earth only, but also as citizens of heaven. You are to recognize, on this occasion, your relation to a higher and better country, with which you are connected by the most sacred ties; and from which you derive those comforts and hopes, that will both purify your life, and render your death happy. The sacrament of the Supper is, in this view, an ascent of the mind above terrestrial things. At the Lord's table we associate ourselves, in some degree, with spirits of a more exalted order. We declare, that we are tending towards their society; and have fixed our final rest within the veil. This view of the institution, so comfortable to the last period of life, is plainly given us in the words of the Text. For it is worthy of particular observation, that, as soon as our Lord had instituted this sacrament, he straightway leads the thoughts of his disciples to a state of future existence. Employing that metaphorical style, which the occasion naturally suggested, he tells them, that though he was not henceforth to drink of the fruit of the vine on earth, yet a day was coming, when he was again to drink it *with them*; to drink it, *in his Father's kingdom*. Two distinct ideas are, in these words, presented to us. One is, the abode into which our Saviour was to remove; *his Father's kingdom*. The other, the society which he was there to enjoy; *with you in my Father's kingdom*. These correspond to the two views under which death is most formidable to men; both of which he intended to banish, by the institution of this sacrament: first, that death is a transition to a new and unknown world; and next, that it is a final separation from all the friends whom we have loved on earth.

FIRST; if death terminates our existence here, the abode to which it translates the faithful followers of Christ, is the kingdom of his Father. The institution of this sacrament dispels all the gloomy ideas of annihilation, of non-existence, of total darkness, which our imagination is ready to associate with the grave. We are here assured, that to good men, death is not the close of being, but a change of state; a removal, from a distant and obscure province of the universe, into the city of God, the chief seat of their Father's kingdom. They have every reason to believe, that the objects which are to meet them there, how new and unknown soever, shall all be propitious and friendly. For into the kingdom of his Father, their Lord has declared, that he is entered as their *forerunner*. *I go to my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.* What reasonings, what speculations, can have power to im-

part so much peace to the dying man, as a promise so direct and explicit, coming from Him who is truth itself, and cannot lie? *If it were not so, I would have told you.** The prospect becomes still more cheering and relieving, when we include

THE other circumstances mentioned in the Text; the society to be enjoyed in that future state of being. *With you I shall drink of the fruit of the vine in my Father's kingdom.* In how amiable a light does our Saviour here appear, looking forward to a future re-union with those beloved friends, whom he was now leaving, as to a circumstance which should increase both his own felicity and theirs, when they met again in a happier world! Thus, in the most affectionate manner, cheering their drooping and dejected spirits; and, by a similar prospect, providing for the comfort of his followers in future generations, when they should be about to leave the world.

The expressions in the Text plainly suggest a joyful intercourse among friends, who had been separated by death; and therefore seem to give much confirmation, to what has always been a favourite hope of good men; that friends shall know and recognise each other, and renew their former connexions, in a future state of existence. How many pleasing prospects does such an intimation open to the mind! How much does it tend to compensate the vanity of life, and to mitigate the sorrows of death! For it is not to be denied, that one of the most bitter circumstances attending death, is the final separation from beloved friends. This is apt equally to wring the hearts of the dying, and the surviving; and it is an anguish of that sort, which descends most deeply into the virtuous and worthy breast. When surrounded with an affectionate family, and weeping friends, a good man is taking his last adieu of all whom he held most dear on earth; when, with a feeble voice, he is giving them his blessing, before he leaves them for ever; when, for the last time, he beholds the countenance, he touches the hand, he hears the voice, of the person nearest his heart; who could bear this bitterness of grief, if no support were to be ministered by religious hope? if there were no voice to whisper to our spirits, that hereafter we, and those whom we love, shall meet again in a more blissful land?—What higher view can possibly be given, of the benefit redounding from this Divine institution, than its affording us consolation in such situations of extreme distress, by realising to our souls the belief of an immortal state, in which all the virtuous and worthy shall be re-united in the presence of their common Lord?

THUS I have set before you many considerations, arising from the sacrament of our Lord's Supper, which render it a proper preparation not only for a good life, but for a comfortable and happy death. The great improvement to be made of the subject is, to bring to the altar of God such dispositions of heart, as may give us ground to hope for this blessed effect. Let us approach to the sacrament with the same seriousness of frame, as if it were the last time we were ever to partake of it; as if we were now making provision for a journey to that land whence none return; as if we were never to *drink*, in this

* John, xiv. 2.

manner, *of the fruit of the vine, until that day when we drink it*, with those whom we have loved, *in our Father's kingdom*.—God only knows to whom this may be truly spoken! God knows who, of this assembly, shall never have opportunity to approach again to the sacred table, and to meet with their brethren, on such an occasion, in the courts of the Lord's house!—Whatever our doom is to be, whether we are appointed for life or for death, such is the frame of mind which now best becomes, and will most improve us, in partaking of the holy sacrament.

LET me caution you, before I conclude, against judging of the propriety of your disposition in this solemn act of worship, solely by the warmth of your affections, and the fervour of your devotion. This state of heart, how desirable soever it may be, cannot be at all times possessed. It depends, in some measure, on natural sensibility. All are not equally endowed with warm and tender feelings. Even they who are susceptible of the highest degrees of pious and virtuous sensibility, cannot, on every occasion, command that happy temperature of mind. We are not, therefore, to judge unfavourably of ourselves, if this be not always the privilege of our devotions. It is chiefly a sedate and composed frame of spirit, that we must study to cultivate; arising from grave and sober thoughts; from serious and penitent recollection of past errors; from good purposes for the future; and from a deep sense of the approaching events of death and immortality. Penetrated with such dispositions, you have ground to come to the altar of God with humble trust and joy; under the belief, that you are approaching, through the great Redeemer, to that merciful Creator, to whom, *in the high and holy place of eternity*, the devout aspirations of his servants on earth are ever acceptable and pleasing.

SERMON XLVI.

ON THE USE AND ABUSE OF THE WORLD.

1 COR. vii. 31.

—*They that use this world as not abusing it.*—

THE world is always represented in Scripture as the great scene of trial to a Christian. It sets before him a variety of duties, which are incumbent on him to perform; and, at the same time, surrounds him with many dangers, against which he has to guard. The part which is proper for him to act, may be comprised in these two expressive words of the Text; *using the world, and not abusing it*; the significance and extent of which, I propose now to explain. The subject is of the higher importance, as in the world we must live; and according as we use, or abuse it, it will prove either our friend, or our greatest foe.

It is natural to begin with observing, that the Christian is here supposed to *use the world*; by which we must certainly understand

the Apostle to mean, maintaining intercourse and connexion with the world; living in it, as one of the members of human society; assuming that rank which belongs to his station. No one can be said to *use the world* who lives not thus. Hence, it follows, that sequestration from the world is no part of Christian duty; and it appears strange, that even among those who approve not of monastic confinement, seclusion from the pleasures of society should have been sometimes considered, as belonging to the character of a religious man. They have been supposed to be the best servants of God, who, consecrating their time to the exercises of devotion, mingle least in the ordinary commerce of the world; and especially who abstain most rigidly from all that has the appearance of amusement. But how pious and sincere soever the intentions of such persons may be, they certainly take not the properest method, either for improving themselves, or for advancing religion among others. For, this is not using the world, but relinquishing it. Instead of making the light of a good example shine, with useful splendour throughout the circle of society, they confine it within a narrow compass. According to the metaphor employed by our Saviour, after the *candle is lighted, they put it under a bushel*. Instead of recommending religion to the world, they exhibit it under the forbidding aspect of unnecessary austerity. Instead of employing their influence to regulate and temper the pleasures of the world, by a moderate participation of those that are innocent, they deliver up all the entertainments of society into the hands of the loose and giddy.

The various dangers which the world presents to one who is desirous of maintaining his piety and integrity, have given rise to this scrupulous caution concerning the use of the world; and, so far, the principle is commendable. But we must remember, that the virtue of a Christian is to be shown, in surmounting dangers which he is called to encounter. Into the post of danger we were ordered by Providence, when we were brought into this world. We were placed as soldiers, on the field of battle. It is there that our fidelity to our great commander must appear. The most signal virtues which adorn and improve the human character, are displayed in active life. There, the strength of the mind is brought forth and put to the test. There, all the amiable dispositions of the heart find their proper exercise; humanity is cultivated; patience, fortitude, and self-denial, come forward in all their forms; and the light of good men's works so shine before others, as to lead them to *glorify their Father which is in heaven*.

It may be assumed, therefore, as a principle justified by the Text, and by the whole strain of Scripture, that *to use*, and in a certain degree to enjoy, *the world*, is altogether consistent with religion. According to the rank which men possess in society, according to their age, their employment, and connexions, their intercourse with the world will be more or less extended. In private life, they use the world with propriety, who are active and industrious in their callings; just and upright in their dealings; sober, contented, and cheerful in their station. When the circumstances of men allow

them a wider command of the enjoyments of the world, of those enjoyments they may freely partake, within the bounds of temperance, moderation, and decency. The highest situations of rank and opulence ought to be distinguished by dignity of character; by extensive beneficence, usefulness, and public spirit; by magnificence, without ostentation; and generous hospitality, without profusion.

We shall have a clearer view of the proper use of the world, when we contrast it with that abuse of the world, which we too often observe. Those abuses manifest themselves in various forms; but in general may be classed under three great heads.

I. THEY are abusers of the world, who intemperately give themselves up to its pleasures, and lead a life of licentiousness, riot, and dissipation. Amidst the wealth and luxury of the present age, it will be admitted, that persons of this description are not unfrequent, who, being opulent in fortune, and perhaps high in rank, think themselves entitled to pass their days in a careless manner, without any other object in view, than the gratification of their senses and passions. It shall be granted, that they are not obliged to that exact economy and attention in their manner of living, which the state of fortune may require of others. Gaiety shall be permitted to them; change of scene, and variety of amusements. But let them not forget, that as men and members of society, not to say professors of the Christian faith, they are bound to stop short in their career of pleasure, as soon as it becomes disgraceful to themselves, and hurtful to the world. By the train of life which they lead, they defeat every purpose for which Providence bestowed on them the blessings of prosperity. They sink every talent which they possess, into useless insignificancy. They corrupt the public manners by their example; and diffuse among others the spirit of extravagance and folly. They behave in a manner altogether unsuitable to the condition of the world in which we live; where we are exposed to so much change, surrounded with so much distress, and daily behold so many affecting scenes, as ought to awaken serious reflection, and chasten dissolute mirth.

With indignant eyes, the sober and thinking part of mankind view the luxury and riot of those abusers of the world. To them are owing the discontents of the poor, their disaffection to their superiors, their proneness to disturb the peace of the world. When the poor behold wealth properly used, they look up with respect to them who possess it. They rest contented in their station, and bless the just and the generous, from whose munificence they receive employment and reward. But when they behold those men of pleasure dissipating, in vice and folly, the fortune which their forefathers had honourably earned; when they behold them oppressing all their dependants, merely that they may revel in luxurious extravagance, then their hearts swell within them; with murmurs of sullen grief, they eye their own mean habitation, and needy family; and become prepared for robbery, tumult, sedition, and every evil work.

The conduct of such abusers of the world is not only pernicious to the welfare of society, and to the interests of virtue; it is equally ruinous to themselves. I shall not insist on the loss of reputation,

the waste of fortune, the broken health, and debilitated frame, which are the well-known consequences of a life of intemperate pleasure. I shall not recount all the better and more substantial enjoyments which they forfeit. Amidst the turbulence of riot, and the fumes of intoxication, unknown to them are the rational entertainments of regular life; the enjoyment of the face of nature; the pleasures of knowledge, and an improved mind; the pleasures of private friendship, and domestic society; the conscious satisfaction which accompanies honest labours, and the justly-acquired esteem of those who surround them. All these they have thrown away; and in their room have substituted, what they think more high and vivid pleasures. But of what nature are those pleasures? *Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.*

At the bottom of the hearts of all men, there lies a secret sense of propriety, virtue, and honour. This sense may be so far blunted, as to lose its influence in guiding men to what is right, while yet it retains its power of making them feel that they are acting wrong. Hence remorse often gnaws the heart, which affects to appear light and gay before the world. Among the crowd of amusements, the voluptuary may endeavour to stifle his uneasiness; but through all his defences it will penetrate. A conscious sense of his own insignificance, when he sees others distinguished for acting a manly and worthy part; reflection on the time he has wasted, and the contempt he has incurred; the galling remembrance of his earlier and better days, when he gave the fair promise of accomplishments, which now are blasted; have frequently been found to sadden the festive hour. The noise of merriment may be heard; but heaviness lies at the heart. While the tabret and the viol play, a melancholy voice sounds in his ears. The wasted estate, the neglected halls, and ruined mansions of his father, rise to view. The angry countenances of his friends seem to stare him in the face. A hand appears to come forth on the wall, and to write his doom.

Retreat, then, from your dishonourable courses, ye who, by licentiousness, extravagance, and vice, are abusers of the world! You are degrading, you are ruining yourselves. You are grossly misemploying the gifts of God; and the giver will not fail to punish. Awake to the pursuits of men of virtue and honour. Break loose from that magic circle, within which you are at present held. Reject the poisoned cup which the enchantress Pleasure holds up to your lips. Draw aside the veil which she throws over your eyes. You will then see other objects than you now behold. You will see a dark abyss opening below your feet. You will see virtue and temperance marking out the road, which conducts to true felicity. You will be enabled to discern, that the world is enjoyed to advantage, by none but such as follow those divine guides; and who consider pleasure as the seasoning, but not as the business, of life.

II. THE world is abused, not only by an intemperate pursuit of its pleasures, but by a sordid attachment to its gains. This respects a set of men of very different description from the former, more decent

in their carriage, and less flagrant in their vices; but corrupted by the world in no less a degree. For the world is often abused by the men of business, as much as by the men of pleasure. When worldly success becomes the sole object of their life; when the accumulation of fortune so engrosses them as to harden their heart against every feeling of moral obligation; when it renders them insensible to the calls of affection, and to the impressions of piety and religion, they then come under the class of the covetous, whom it is said, *the Lord abhorreth.*

The world, with its advantages, is a lawful object of pursuit to a Christian. He may seek, by fair industry, to render his circumstances affluent. Without reproof, he may aim at distinction and consideration in the world. He may bestow a considerable portion of his time and attention on the successful management of his worldly interest. All this is within the limits of that allowable use of the world, to which religion gives its sanction. But to a wise and good man, the world is only a secondary object. He remembers there is an eternity beyond it. His care is, not merely to amass and possess, but to use his possessions well, as one who is accountable to God. He is not a slave, either to the hopes, or the fears, of the world. He would rather forfeit any present advantage, than obtain it at the expence of violating the Divine law, or neglecting his duty. This is using the world like a good man. This is living in it, as a subject of God, and a member of the great community of mankind. To such a man, riches are a blessing. He may enjoy them with magnificence, but he will use them with liberality. They open a wide field to the exercise of his virtue, and allow it to shine with diffusive lustre.

Very opposite to this is the character of the worldly-minded. To them, the mere attainment of earthly possessions is an ultimate aim. They cannot be said to *use the world*; for, to possess, not to use or enjoy, is their object. They are emphatically said in Scripture, to *load themselves with thick clay.*† Some sort of apology may be framed for them who seek to extract from the world, pleasure of one kind or other. But for those who know no pleasure, farther than *adding house to house, and field to field*, and calling them their own, it is hardly possible to frame any apology. Such persons are idolaters of the worst kind; for they have made the world their God. They daily worship and bow down before it; and hold nothing to be mean or base, which can promote the enlargement of their fortune. — He is an abuser of the world, let his possession of it be ever so ample, who knows nothing higher than the gains of the world. He is an abuser of the world, who sacrifices probity, virtue, or humanity, to its interests. He is an abuser of the world, who cannot occasionally retreat from it, to consider what character he bears in the sight of God; and to what issue his conduct will bring him at last. In a word, the world is then properly used, when it is generously and beneficially enjoyed; neither hoarded up by avarice, nor squandered by ostentation.

III. The world is abused, by those who employ its advantages to

* Psalm x. 3.

† Habak. ii. 6.

the injury or oppression of their brethren. Under this class are included, the worst and most criminal abusers of the world; who turn against their fellow-creatures, those advantages with which it has pleased Heaven to distinguish them. It is a class which comprehends the sovereign who tyrannises over his people; the great man who depresses his dependants; the master who is cruel to his servants; every one, in fine, who renders his superiority of any kind, whether of wealth or power, unnecessarily grievous to those who are his inferiours: Whose superciliousness dejects the modest; whose insolence tramples on the poor; whose rigour makes the widow and the orphan weep. Persons of this character, while thus abusing the advantages of the world, may, for a while, enjoy their triumph. But let them not think, their triumph is always to last. Their turn shall come to be humbled as low as those whom they now oppress. For there is a vigilant eye in the heavens, attentive to observe their procedure. There is an impartial ear, which listens to every just complaint preferred against them. There is an irresistible arm stretched over their heads, whose weight they shall one day feel. The Sovereign of the universe characterises himself in the sacred writings, as peculiarly an adversary to the insolent and haughty. *For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord; I will set him in safety from him that puffeth at him.* I will come near to you in judgment; and I will be a swift witness against those that oppress the hireling in his wages, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right.† He that oppresseth the poor, reproacheth his Maker.† The Lord will plead their cause; and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.‡*

After hearing these awful words, is it not strange, O men, at once infatuated and cruel! that you cannot use the world without abusing it to the distress of your brethren? Even supposing no punishment to be threatened, no arm to be lifted up against you, is there nothing within you, that relents at the circumstances of those below you in the world? Is it not enough, that they suffer their own hard fate, without its being aggravated by your severity and oppression? Why must the aged, the poor, and the friendless, tremble at your greatness? Cannot you be happy, unless you make them eat their scanty morsel in bitterness of heart? Yet a happy! — profane not the word — what is such happiness as yours, compared with that of him who could say, *When the ear heard me, then it blessed me; and when the eye saw me, it gave witness to me: Because I delivered the poor that cried, and the fatherless, and him that had none to help him. I was a father to the poor. The blessing of him that was ready to perish, came upon me; and I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy.‖* How properly did such a man use the world, and with what just honour did he flourish in it! *Unto me men gave ear; they kept silence, and waited for my counsel. The princes refrained talking. The aged arose, and stood up. My root was spread out by the waters, and the dew lay upon my branch. — Not only, unknown to you are such pleasures of virtu-*

* Psalm xii. 5.

† Prov. xii. 23.

† Mal. iii. 5.

‖ Job, xxix. 9—21.

‡ Prov. xiv. 31.

ous prosperity; but, even previous to prepared punishment, be assured, that remorse is approaching to wring your hearts. Of the world, which you now abuse, in a short time nothing shall remain, but the horror arising from remembered crimes. The wages you have detained, the wealth you have squeezed from the needy, shall lie heavy on your souls. The stately buildings which your pride has erected, by means of violence and oppression, shall seem haunted by injured ghosts. *The stone shall cry out of the wall, and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.** When you lie on the bed of death, the poor, whom you have oppressed, shall appear to you as gathered together; stretching forth their hands, and lifting up their voices against you, at the tribunal of Heaven. *I have seen the wicked great in power, and spreading himself like a green bay-tree. But he passed away, and was not. I sought him, but he could not be found. They are brought down to desolation in a moment, and utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O Lord, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.†*

THUS I have shown what it is to use, and what to abuse the world. When, according to our different stations, we enjoy the advantages of the world with propriety and decency; temperate in our pleasures; moderate in our pursuits of interest; mindful of our duty to God, and, at the same time, just, humane, and generous to our brethren; when, and then only, we use the world, as becomes men, and Christians. Within these limits, we may safely enjoy all the comforts which the world affords, and our station allows. But if we pass beyond these boundaries, into the regions of disorderly and vicious pleasure, of debasing covetousness or of oppressive insolence, the world will then serve only to corrupt our minds, and to accelerate our ruin. The licentious, the avaricious, and the insolent, form the three great classes of abusers of the world.

Let not those who are in wealthy and flourishing circumstances, complain of the restraints which religious doctrine attempts to impose on their enjoyments. For, to what do these restraints amount? To no more than this, that, by their pleasures, they would neither injure themselves, nor injure others. We call not on the young, to relinquish their gaiety; nor on the rich, to forego their opulence; nor on the great, to lay aside their state. We only call on them, not to convert gaiety into licentiousness; not to employ opulence in mere extravagance; nor to abuse greatness for the oppression of their inferiours: While they enjoy the world, not to forget that they are the subjects of God, and are soon to pass into another state. Let the motive by which the Apostle enforces the exhortation in the Text, present itself to their thought; *Use this world as not abusing it; for the fashion of the world passeth away.* Its pomp and its pleasures, its riches, magnificence, and glory, are no more than a transient show. Every thing that we here enjoy, changes, decays, and comes to an end. All floats on the surface of a river, which, with swift current, is running towards a boundless ocean. Beyond this present scene of things, above those sublunary regions, we are to look for what is

* Habak. ii. 11.

† Psalm xxxvii. 35, 36. — lxxiii. 19, 20.

permanent and stable. The world passes away; but God, and heaven, and virtue, continue unchangeably the same. We are soon to enter into eternal habitations; and into these, our works shall follow us. The consequences shall for ever remain of the part which we have acted as good or bad men; as faithful subjects of God, or as servants of a vain world.

SERMON XLVII

ON EXTREMES IN RELIGIOUS AND MORAL CONDUCT.

PROV. iv. 27.

Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left.

I WILL behave myself wisely, said the Psalmist David, *in a perfect way.** Wisdom is no less necessary in religious, and moral, than in civil conduct. Unless there be a proper degree of light in the understanding, it will not be enough, that there are good dispositions in the heart. Without regular guidance, they will often err from the right scope. They will be always wavering and unsteady; nay, on some occasions, they may betray us into evil. This is too much verified by that propensity to run into extremes, which so often appears in the behaviour of men. How many have originally set out with good principles and intentions, who, through want of discretion in the application of their principles, have in the end injured themselves, and brought discredit on religion? There is a certain temperate mean, in the observance of which piety and virtue consist. On each side there lies a dangerous extreme. Bewildering paths open; by deviating into which, men are apt to forfeit all the praise of their good intentions; and to finish with reproach, what they had begun with honour. This is the ground of the wise man's exhortation in the Text. *Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Ponder the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left; remove thy foot from evil.* In discoursing from these words, I purpose to point out some of the extremes into which men are apt to run in religion and morals; and to suggest directions for guarding against them.

WITH regard to religious principle in general, it may perhaps be expected, that I should warn you of the danger of being, on one hand, too rigid in adhering to it; and, on the other hand, too easy in relaxing it. But the distinction between these supposed extremes, I conceive to have no foundation. No man can be too strict in his adherence to a principle of duty. Here, there is no extreme. All relaxation of principle is criminal. What conscience dictates, is to be ever obeyed. Its commands are universally sacred. Even though it should be misled, yet as long as we conceive it to utter the voice of God, in disobeying it we sin. The error, therefore, to be here

* Psalm ci. 2.

avoided is, not too scrupulous or tender regard to conscience,* but too little care to have conscience properly enlightened, with respect to what is matter of duty and of sin. — Receive not, without examination, whatever human tradition has consecrated as sacred. Recur, on every occasion, to those great fountains of light and knowledge, which are opened to you in the pure word of God. Distinguish, with care, between the superstitious fancies of men, and the everlasting commandments of God. Exhaust not on trifles that zeal, which ought to be reserved for the weightier matters of the law. Overload not conscience, with what is frivolous and unnecessary. But when you have once drawn the line, with intelligence and precision, between duty and sin, that line you ought on no occasion to transgress.

THOUGH there is no extreme in the reverence due to conscience, there may undoubtedly be an extreme in laying too much stress, either on mere principle, or on mere practice. Here we must take particular care, not to *turn to the right hand, nor to the left*; but to *hold faith and a good conscience** united, as the Scripture, with great propriety, exhorts us. The error of resting wholly on faith, or wholly on works, is one of those seductions, which most easily mislead men; under the semblance of piety on the one hand, and of virtue on the other.* This is not an error peculiar to our times. It has obtained in every age of the Christian church. It has run through all the different modes of false religion. It forms the chief distinction of all the various sects which have divided, and which still continue to divide, the church; according as they have leaned most to the side of belief, or to the side of morality.

Did we listen candidly to the voice of Scripture, it would guard us against either extreme. The Apostle Paul every where testifies, that by no works of our own we can be justified; and that *without faith it is impossible to please God*. The Apostle James as clearly shows, that faith, if it be unproductive of good works, justifies no man. Between those sentiments, there is no opposition. Faith without works is nugatory and insignificant. It is a foundation, without any superstructure raised upon it. It is a fountain which sends forth no stream; a tree which neither bears fruit, nor affords shade. Good works, again, without good principles, are a fair but airy structure; without firmness or stability. They resemble the house built on the sand; the reed which shakes with every wind. You must join the two in full union, if you would exhibit the character of a real Christian. He who sets faith in opposition to morals, or morals in opposition to faith, is equally an enemy to the interest of religion. He holds up to view an imperfect and disfigured form, in the room of what ought to command respect from all beholders. By leaning to one extreme, he is in danger of falling into vice; by the other, of running into impiety.

WHATEVER the belief of men be, they generally pride themselves in the possession of some good moral qualities. The sense of duty is deeply rooted in the human heart. Without some pretence to

* 1 Tim. i. 19.

virtue, there is no self-esteem; and no man wishes to appear, in his own view, as entirely worthless. But as there is a constant strife between the lower and higher parts of our nature, between inclination and principle, this produces much contradiction and inconsistency in conduct. Hence arise most of the extremes, into which men run in their moral behaviour; resting their whole worth on that good quality, to which, by constitution or temper, they are most inclined.

ONE of the first and most common of those extremes, is that of placing all virtue, either in justice, on the one hand; or in generosity, on the other. The opposition between these, is most discernible among two different classes of men in society. They who have earned their fortune by a laborious and industrious life, are naturally tenacious of what they have painfully acquired. To justice they consider themselves as obliged; but to go beyond it in acts of kindness, they consider as superfluous and extravagant. They will not take any advantage of others, which conscience tells them is iniquitous; but neither will they make any allowance for their necessities and wants. They contend, with rigorous exactness, for what is due to themselves. They are satisfied, if no man suffer unjustly by them. That no one is benefited by them, gives them little concern. — Another set of men place their whole merit in generosity and mercy; while to justice and integrity they pay small regard. These are persons generally of higher rank, and of easy fortune. To them, justice appears a sort of vulgar virtue, requisite chiefly in the petty transactions which those of inferior station carry on with one another. But humanity and liberality, they consider as more refined virtues, which dignify their character, and cover all their failings. They can relent at representations of distress; can bestow with ostentatious generosity; can even occasionally share their wealth with a companion of whom they are fond; while, at the same time, they withhold from others what is due to them; are negligent of their family and their relations; and to the just demands of their creditors give no attention.

Both these classes of men run to a faulty extreme. They divide moral virtue between them. Each takes that part of it only which suits his temper. Without justice, there is no virtue. But without humanity and mercy, no virtuous character is complete. The one man leans to the extreme of parsimony: the other to that of profusion. The temper of the one is unfeeling. The sensibility of the other is thoughtless. The one you may in some degree respect; but you cannot love. The other may be loved; but cannot be respected: and it is difficult to say, which character is most defective. — We must undoubtedly begin with being just, before we attempt to be generous. At the same time, he who goes no further than bare justice, stops at the beginning of virtue. We are commanded to *do justly*, but to *love mercy*. The one virtue regulates our actions; the other improves our heart and affections. Each is equally necessary to the happiness of the world. Justice is the pillar that upholds the whole fabric of human society. Mercy is

the genial ray, which cheers and warms the habitations of men. The perfection of our social character consists, in properly tempering the two with one another; in holding that middle course, which admits of our being just, without being rigid; and allows us to be generous, without being unjust.

We must next guard against either too great severity, or too great facility of manners. These are extremes, of which we every day behold instances in the world. He who leans to the side of severity, is harsh in his censures, and narrow in his opinions. He cannot condescend to others in things indifferent. He has no allowance to make for human frailty; or for the difference of age, rank, or temper, among mankind. With him, all gaiety is sinful levity; and every amusement is a crime. To this extreme, the admonition of Solomon may be understood to belong: *Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself overwise. Why shouldest thou destroy thyself?** When the severity of manners is hypocritical, and assumed as a cloak to secret indulgence, it is one of the worst prostitutions of religion. But I now consider it, not as the effect of design, but of natural austerity of temper, and of contracted maxims of conduct. Its influence upon the person himself, is to render him gloomy and sour; upon others, to alienate them both from his society, and his counsels; upon religion, to set it forth as a morose and forbidding principle. — The opposite extreme to this is, perhaps, still more dangerous; that of too great facility, and accommodation to the ways of others. The man of this character, partly from indolent weakness, and partly from softness of temper, is disposed to a tame and universal assent. Averse either to contradict or to blame, he goes along with the manners that prevail. He views every character with indulgent eye; and with good dispositions in his breast, and a natural reluctance to profligacy and vice, he is enticed to the commission of evils which he condemns, merely through want of fortitude to oppose others.

Nothing, it must be confessed, in moral conduct, is more difficult, than to avoid turning here, either *to the right hand, or to the left*. One of the greatest trials both of wisdom and virtue is, to preserve a just medium, between that harshness of austerity, which disgusts and alienates mankind, and that weakness of good nature, which opens the door to sinful excess. The one separates us too much from the world. The other connects us too closely with it; and seduces us to *follow the multitude in doing evil*. One who is of the former character, studies too little to be agreeable, in order to render himself useful. He who is of the latter, by studying too much to be agreeable, forfeits his innocence. If the one hurt religion, by clothing it in the garb of unnecessary strictness; the other, by unwarrantable compliance, strengthens the power of corruption in the world. The one borders on the character of the Pharisee; the other, on that of the Sadducee. True religion enjoins us to stand at an equal distance from both; and to pursue the difficult, but honourable aim, of uniting good-nature with fixed religious principle; affable manners, with untainted virtue.

* Eccles. vii. 16.

FARTHER; we run to one extreme, when we condemn altogether the opinions of mankind; to another, when we court their praise too eagerly. The former discovers a high degree of pride and self-conceit. The latter betrays servility of spirit. We are formed by nature and Providence, to be connected with one another. No man can stand entirely alone, and independent of all his fellow-creatures. A reasonable regard, therefore, for their esteem and good opinion, is a commendable principle. It flows from humanity, and coincides with the desire of being mutually useful. But if that regard be carried too far, it becomes the source of much corruption. For, in the present state of mankind, the praise of the world often interferes with our acting that steady and conscientious part, which gains the approbation of God. Hence arises the difficulty of drawing a proper line, between the allowable regard for reputation, and the excessive desire of praise. On the one side, and on the other, danger meets us; and either extreme will be pernicious to virtue.

He who extinguishes all regard to the sentiments of mankind, suppresses one incentive to honourable deeds; nay, he removes one of the strongest checks on vice. For, where there is no desire of praise, there will be also no sense of reproach and shame; and when this sense is destroyed, the way is paved to open profligacy. On the other hand, he who is actuated solely by the love of human praise, encroaches on the higher respect which he owes to conscience, and to God. Hence, virtue is often counterfeited; and many a splendid appearance has been exhibited to the world, which had no basis in real principle, or inward affection. Hence religious truths have been disguised, or unfairly represented, in order to be suited to popular taste. Hence the Scribes and Pharisees rejected our blessed Lord, *because they loved the praise of men, more than the praise of God.* — Turn, therefore, neither to *the right hand, nor to the left.* Affect not to despise what the world thinks of your conduct and character; and yet, let not the sentiments of the world entirely rule you. Let a desire of esteem be one motive of your conduct; but let it hold a subordinate place. Measure the regard that is due to the opinions of men, by the degree in which these coincide with the law of God.

ALLOW me next to suggest, the danger of running to the extreme of anxiety about worldly interests on the one hand, and of negligence on the other. It is hard to say which of these extremes is fraught with most vice and most misery. Industry and diligence are unquestionable duties, strictly enforced on all Christians; and he who fails in making suitable provision for his household and family, is pronounced to be *worse than an infidel.* But there are bounds, within which our concern for worldly success must be confined. For anxiety is the certain poison of human life. It debases the mind; and sharpens all the passions. It involves men in perpetual distractions, and tormenting cares; and leads them aside from what ought to be the great scope of human action. Anxiety is, in general, the effect of a covetous temper. Negligence is commonly the offspring of licentiousness, and always the parent of universal disorder. By anxiety, you render yourselves miserable. By negligence, you too

often occasion the ruin of others. The anxious man is the votary of riches; the negligent man the votary of pleasure. Each offers his mistaken worship, at the shrine of a false deity; and each shall reap only such rewards as an idol can bestow; the one sacrificing the enjoyment and improvement of the present, to vain cares about futurity, the other so totally taken up in enjoying the present, as to store the future with certain misery.—True virtue holds a temperate course between these extremes: neither careless of to-morrow, nor taking too much thought for it; diligent, but not anxious; prudent, but not covetous; attentive to provide comfortable accommodation on earth, but chiefly concerned to *lay up treasures in Heaven*.

I SHALL only warn you farther against the extreme of engaging in a course of life too busy and hurried, or of devoting yourselves to one too retired and unemployed. We are formed for a mixture of action, and retreat. Our connexions with society, and the performance of duties which we owe to one another, necessarily engage us in active life. What we owe to ourselves, requires occasional retirement. For he who lives always in the bustle of the world, cannot, it is to be feared, always preserve his virtue pure. Sentiments of piety will be deprived of that nourishment and support, which they would derive from meditation and devotion. His temper will be often ruffled and disturbed. His passions will be kept too much on the stretch. From the contagious manners which every-where abound, he will not be able to avoid contracting some dangerous infection.—On the other hand, he who flies to total retreat, in order either to enjoy ease, or to escape from the temptations of the world, will often find disquiet meeting him in solitude, and the worst temptations arising from within himself. Unoccupied by active and honourable pursuits, unable to devote his whole time to improving thoughts, many an evil passion will start up, and occupy the vacant hour. Sullenness and gloom will be in danger of overwhelming him. Peevish displeasure, and suspicions of mankind, are apt to persecute those who withdraw themselves altogether from the haunts of men.—Steer therefore a middle course, between a life oppressed with business, on the one hand; and burdened, for the burden is no less, with idleness on the other. Provide for yourselves matter of fair and honest pursuit, to afford a proper object to the active powers of the mind. Temper business with serious meditation; and enliven retreat by returns of action and industry.

THUS I have pointed out some of those extremes into which men are apt to run, by forsaking the line which religion and wisdom have drawn. Many more, I am sensible, might be suggested; for the field is wide, and hardly is there any appearance of piety, virtue, or good conduct, but what the folly of men is apt to push into undue excess, on one or other side. What I have mentioned, will be sufficient to show the necessity of prudent circumspection, in order to escape the dangers which beset us in this state of trial. Let us study to attain a regular, uniform, consistent character; where nothing that is excessive or disproportioned shall come forward to view; which shall not plume itself with a fair show on one side only, while in other

quarters it remains unadorned and blemished; but where the different parts of worth and goodness shall appear united, and each shall exert its proper influence on conduct. Thus, *turning neither to the right hand nor to the left*, we shall, as far as our frailty permits, approach to the perfection of the human character; and shall have reason *not to be ashamed, when we have equal respect to all God's commandments.*

SERMON XLVIII.

ON SCOFFING AT RELIGION.

2 PETER, iii. 3.

— *There shall come in the last days scoffers.*—

As the Christian religion is adverse to the inclinations and passions of the corrupted part of mankind, it has been its fate, in every age, to encounter the opposition of various foes. Sometimes, it has undergone the storms of violence and persecution. Sometimes, it has been attacked by the arms of false reasoning and sophistry. When these have failed of success, it has at other times been exposed to the scoffs of the petulant. Men of light and frivolous minds, who had no comprehension of thought for discerning what is great, and no solidity of judgment for deciding on what is true, have taken upon them to treat religion with contempt, as if it were of no consequence to the world. They have affected to represent the whole of that venerable fabric which has so long commanded the respect of mankind; which for ages the learned have supported, and the wise have admired, as having no better foundation than the gloomy imagination of fanatics and visionaries. Of this character were those *scoffers*, predicted by the Apostle to arise *in the last days*; a prediction which we have seen too often fulfilled. As the false colours, which such men throw on religion, are apt to impose on the weak and unwary, let us now examine, whether religion affords any just grounds for the contempt or ridicule of the scoffer. They must be either the doctrines, or the precepts, of religion, which he endeavours to hold forth to contempt.

THE doctrines of the Christian religion are rational and pure. All that it has revealed concerning the perfections of God, his moral government and laws, the destination of man, and the rewards and punishments of a future state, is perfectly consonant to the most enlightened reason. In some articles which transcend the limits of our present faculties, as in what relates to the essence of the Godhead, the fallen state of mankind, and their redemption by Jesus Christ, its doctrines may appear mysterious and dark. Against these the scoffer has often directed his attacks; as if whatever could not be explained by us, ought upon that account to be exploded as absurd.

It is unnecessary to enter, at present, on any particular defence of these doctrines, as there is one observation, which, if duly weighed,

is sufficient to silence the cavils of the scoffer. Is he not compelled to admit, that the whole system of nature around him is full of mystery? What reason, then, had he to suppose that the doctrines of revelation, proceeding from the same author, were to contain no mysterious obscurity? All that is requisite for the conduct of life, both in nature and in religion, Divine wisdom has rendered obvious to all. As nature has afforded us sufficient information concerning what is necessary for our food, our accommodation, and our safety; so religion has plainly instructed us in our duty towards God, and our neighbour. But as soon as we attempt to rise towards objects that lie beyond our immediate sphere of action, our curiosity is checked; and darkness meets us on every side. What the essence is of those material bodies which we see and handle; how a seed grows up into a tree; how man is formed in the womb; or how the mind acts upon the body, after it is formed; are mysteries of which we can give no more account, than of the most obscure and difficult parts of revelation. We are obliged to admit the existence of the fact, though the explanation of it exceeds our faculties.

After the same manner, in natural religion, questions arise concerning the creation of the world from nothing, the origin of evil under the government of a perfect Being, and the consistency of human liberty with Divine prescience, which are of as intricate nature, and of as difficult solution, as any questions in Christian theology. We may plainly see, that we are not admitted into the secrets of Providence, any more than into the mysteries of the God-head. In all his ways, the Almighty is a God that *hideth himself. He maketh darkness his pavilion. He holdeth back the face of his throne; and spreadeth a thick cloud upon it.*—Instead of its being any objection to revelation, that some of its doctrines are mysterious, it would be much more strange and unaccountable, if no such doctrines were found in it. Had every thing in the Christian system been perfectly level to our capacities, this might rather have given ground to a suspicion, of its not proceeding from God; since it would have been then so unlike to what we find, both in the system of the universe, and in the system of natural religion. Whereas, according as matters now stand, the Gospel has the same features, the same general character, with the other two, which are acknowledged to be of divine origin; plain and comprehensible, in what relates to practice; dark and mysterious, in what relates to speculation and belief.* The cavils of the scoffer, therefore, on this head, are so far from having any just foundation, that they only discover his ignorance, and the narrowness of his views.

LET us next proceed to what relates to practice, or the preceptive part of religion. The duties which religion enjoins us to perform towards God, are those which have oftenest furnished matter to the scoffs of the licentious. They attempt to represent these as so idle and superfluous, that they could owe their birth to nothing but enthusiasm.—For, is not the Deity so far exalted above us, as to

* See this argument fully pursued, and placed in a strong light, by the masterly hand of Bishop Butler, in his *Analogy of Natural and Revealed Religion*.

receive neither advantage nor pleasure from our worship? What are our prayers, or our praises, to that infinite mind, who, resting in the full enjoyment of his own beatitude, beholds all his creatures passing before him, only as the insects of a day? What but superstitious terrors, could have dictated those forms of homage, and those distinctions of sacred days, in which vulgar minds delight, but which the liberal and enlarged look upon with scorn?

Now, in return to such insults of the scoffer, it might be sufficient to observe, that the united sentiments of mankind, in every age and nation, are against him. Thoughtless as the bulk of men are, and attached only to objects which they see around them; this principle has never been extinguished in their breasts, that to the great Parent of the human race, the universal, though invisible, benefactor of the world, not only internal reverence, but external homage, is due. Whether he need that homage or not, is not the question. It is what, on our part, we undoubtedly owe; and the heart is, with reason, held to be base, which stifles the emotions of gratitude to a benefactor, how independent soever he may be of any returns. True virtue always prompts a public declaration of the grateful sentiments which it feels; and glories in expressing them. Accordingly, over all the earth, crowds of worshippers have assembled to adore, in various forms, the Ruler of the world. In these adorations, the philosopher, the savage, and the saint, have equally joined. None but the cold and unfeeling can look up to that beneficent Being, who is at the head of the universe, without some inclination to pray, or to praise. In vain, therefore, would the scoffer deride, what the loud voice of nature demands and justifies. He erects himself against the general and declared sense of the human race.

But, apart from this consideration, I must call on him to attend to one of a still more serious and awful nature. By his licentious ridicule of the duties of piety, and of the institutions of divine worship, he is weakening the power of conscience over men; he is undermining the great pillars of society; he is giving a mortal blow to public order, and public happiness. All these rest on nothing so much, as on the general belief of an all-seeing witness, and the general veneration of an Almighty Governour. On this belief, and this veneration, is founded the whole obligation of an oath; without which, government could not be administered, nor courts of justice act; controversies could not be determined, nor private property be preserved safe. Our only security against innumerable crimes, to which the restraints of human life cannot reach, is the dread of an invisible avenger, and of those future punishments which he hath prepared for the guilty. Remove this dread from the minds of men; and you strengthen the hands of the wicked, and endanger the safety of human society.

But how could impressions so necessary to the public welfare be preserved, if there were no religious assemblies, no sacred institutions, no days set apart for divine worship, in order to be solemn remembrancers to men of the existence and the dominion of God, and of the future account they have to give of their actions to him?

To all ranks of men, the sentiments which public religion tends to awaken, are salutary and beneficial. But with respect to the inferior classes, it is well known, that the only principles which restrain them from evil, are acquired in the religious assemblies which they frequent. Destitute of the advantages of regular education; ignorant, in great measure, of public laws; unacquainted with those refined ideas of honour and propriety, to which others of more knowledge have been trained; were those sacred temples deserted to which they now resort, they would be in danger of degenerating into a ferocious race, from whom lawless violence was perpetually to be dreaded.

He, therefore, who treats sacred things with any degree of levity and scorn, is acting the part, perhaps without his seeing or knowing it, of a public enemy to society. He is precisely the *madman* described in the book of Proverbs, *who casteth firebrands, arrows, and death; and saith, Am I not in sport?** We shall hear him, at times, complain loudly of the undutifulness of children, of the dishonesty of servants, of the tumults and insolence of the lower ranks; while he himself is, in a great measure, responsible for the disorders of which he complains. By the example which he sets of contempt for religion, he becomes accessory to the manifold crimes, which that contempt occasions among others. By his scoffing at sacred institutions, he is encouraging the rabble to uproar and violence; he is emboldening the false witness to take the name of God in vain; he is, in effect, putting arms into the hands of the highwayman, and letting loose the robber on the streets by night.

WE come next to consider that great class of duties, which respect our conduct towards our fellow-creatures. The absolute necessity of these to general welfare is so apparent, as to have secured them, in a great degree, from the attacks of the scoffer. He who would attempt to turn justice, truth, or honesty, into ridicule, would be avoided by every one. To those who had any remains of principle, he would be odious. To those who attended only to their interest, he would appear a dangerous man. But, though the social virtues are treated in general as respectable and sacred, there are certain forms and degrees of them which have not been exempted from the scorn of the unthinking. That extensive generosity, and high public spirit, which prompt a man to sacrifice his own interest, in order to promote some great general good; and that strict and scrupulous integrity, which will not allow one, on any occasion, to depart from the truth; have often been treated with contempt by those who are called men of the world. They who will not stoop to flatter the great; who disdain to comply with prevailing manners, when they judge them to be evil; who refuse to take the smallest advantage of others, in order to procure the greatest benefit for themselves; are represented as persons of romantic character, and visionary notions, unacquainted with the world, and unfit to live in it.

Such persons are so far from being liable to any just ridicule, that they are entitled to a degree of respect, which approaches to vener-

* Prov. xxvi. 18, 19.

ation. For they are, in truth, the great supporters and guardians of public order. The authority of their character overawes the giddy multitude. The weight of their example retards the progress of corruption; checks that relaxation of morals, which is always too apt to gain ground insensibly, and to make encroachments on every department of society. Accordingly, it is this high generosity of spirit, this inflexible virtue, this regard to principle, superiour to all opinion, which has ever marked the characters of those who have eminently distinguished themselves in public life; who have patronized the cause of justice against powerful oppressors; who, in critical times, have supported the falling rights and liberties of men; and have reflected honour on their nation and country. Such persons may have been scoffed at by some among whom they lived; but posterity has done them ample justice; and they are the persons, whose names are recorded to future ages, and who are thought and spoken of with admiration.

The mere temporizer, the man of accommodating principles, and inferior virtue, may support a plausible character for a while among his friends and followers; but as soon as the hollowness of his principles is detected, he sinks into contempt. They who are prone to deride men of inflexible integrity, only betray the littleness of their minds. They show that they understand not the sublime of virtue; that they have no discernment of the true excellence of man. By affecting to throw any discouragement on purity and strictness of morals, they not only expose themselves to just contempt, but propagate sentiments very dangerous to society. For, if we loosen the regard due to virtue in any of its parts, we begin to sap the whole of it. No man, as it has been often said, becomes entirely profligate at once. He deviates, step by step, from conscience. If the loose casuistry of the scoffer were to prevail, open dishonesty, falsehood, and treachery, would speedily grow out of those complying principles, those relaxations of virtue, which he would represent to be necessary for every man who knows the world.

The last class of virtues I am to mention, are those which are of a personal nature, and which respect the government to be exercised over our pleasures and passions. Here, the scoffer has always considered himself as having an ample field. Often, and often, have such virtues, as sobriety, temperance, modesty, and chastity, been made the subject of ridicule, as monkish habits which exclude men from the company of the fashionable and the gay; habits, which are the effect of low education, or of mean spirits, or of mere feebleness of constitution; while scoffers, *walking*, as it is too truly said of them by the Apostle, *after their lusts*, boast of their own manners as liberal and free, as manly and spirited. They fancy themselves raised thereby much above the crowd; and hold all those in contempt, who confine themselves within the vulgar bounds of regular and orderly life.

Infatuated men! who see not that the virtues of which they make sport, not only derive their authority from the laws of God, but are moreover essentially requisite both to public and to private happiness.

By the indulgence of their licentious pleasures for a while, as long as youth and vigour remain, a few passing gratifications may be obtained. But what are the consequences? Suppose any individual to persevere unrestrained in this course, it is certainly to be followed by disrepute in his character, and disorder in his affairs; by a wasted and broken constitution; and a speedy and miserable old age. Suppose a society to be wholly formed of such persons as the scoffers applaud; suppose it to be filled with none but those whom they call the sons of pleasure; that is, with the intemperate, the riotous, and dissolute, among whom all regard to sobriety, decency, and private virtue, was abolished; what an odious scene would such a society exhibit? How unlike any civilized or well-ordered state, in which mankind have chosen to dwell? What turbulence and uproar, what contests and quarrels, would perpetually reign in it? What man of common understanding would not rather chuse to dwell in a desert, than to be associated for life with such companions? Shall, then, the scoffer presume to make light of those virtues, without which there could be neither peace, nor comfort, nor good order, among mankind?

Let him be desired to think of his domestic situation and connexions. Is he a father, a husband, or a brother? Has he any friend or relation, male or female, in whose happiness he is interested? — Let us put the question to him, whether he be willing that intemperance, unchastity, or dissipation of any kind, should mark their character? Would he recommend to them such excesses? Would he chuse, in their presence, openly, and without disguise, to scoff at the opposite virtues, as of no consequence to their welfare? — If even the most licentious shudder at the thought; if, in the midst of his loose pleasures, he be desirous that his own family should remain untainted; let this teach him the value of those private virtues, which in the hours of dissipation, in the giddiness of his mind, he is ready to condemn. Banish sobriety, temperance, and purity, and you tear up the foundations of all public order, and all domestic quiet. You render every house a divided and miserable abode, resounding with terms of shame, and mutual reproaches of infamy. You leave nothing respectable in the human character. You change the man into a brute.

THE conclusion from all the reasoning which we have now pursued is, that religion and virtue, in all their forms, either of doctrine or of precept; of piety towards God, integrity towards men; or regularity in private conduct; are so far from affording any grounds of ridicule to the petulant, that they are entitled to our highest veneration; they are names which should never be mentioned, but with the utmost honour. It is said in Scripture, *Fools make a mock at sin.** They had better make a mock at pestilence, at war, or famine. With one who should chuse these public calamities for the subject of his sport, you would not be inclined to associate. You would fly from him, as worse than a fool; as a man of distempered mind, from whom you might be in hazard of receiving a sudden blow. Yet certain it is, that, to the great society of mankind, sin is a greater

* Prov. xiv. 9.

calamity than either pestilence, or famine, or war. These operate, only as occasional causes of misery. But the sins and vices of men are perpetual scourges of the world. Impiety and injustice, fraud and falsehood, intemperance and profligacy, are daily producing mischief and disorder; bringing ruin on individuals; tearing families and communities in pieces; giving rise to a thousand tragical scenes on this unhappy theatre. In proportion as manners are vicious, mankind are unhappy. The perfection of virtue, which reigns in the world above, is the chief source of the perfect blessedness which prevails there.

When, therefore, we observe any tendency to treat religion or morals with disrespect and levity, let us hold it to be a sure indication of a perverted understanding, or a depraved heart. *In the seat of the scorner, let us never sit. Let us account that wit contaminated, which attempts to sport itself on sacred subjects. When the scoffer arises, let us maintain the honour of our God, and our Redeemer; and resolutely adhere to the cause of virtue and goodness. The lips of the wise utter knowledge; but the mouth of the foolish is near to destruction. Him that honoureth God, God will honour. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and he that keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul.*

SERMON XLIX.

ON THE CREATION OF THE WORLD.

GEN. i. 1.

In the beginning God created the heaven, and the earth.

SUCH is the commencement of the history of mankind; an æra, to which we must ever look back with solemn awe and veneration. Before the sun and the moon had begun their course; before the sound of the human voice was heard, or the name of man was known; *in the beginning God created the heaven, and the earth.* — To a beginning of the world, we are led back by every thing that now exists; by all history, all records, all monuments of antiquity. In tracing the transactions of past ages, we arrive at a period, which clearly indicates the infancy of the human race. We behold the world peopled by degrees. We ascend to the origin of all those useful and necessary arts, without the knowledge of which, mankind could hardly subsist. We discern society and civilization arising from rude beginnings, in every corner of the earth; and gradually advancing to the state in which we now find them: All which afford plain evidence, that there was a period, when mankind began to inhabit and cultivate the earth. What is very remarkable, the most authentic chronology and history of most nations, coincides with the account of Scripture; and makes the period during which the world has been inhabited by the race of men, not to extend beyond six thousand years.

To the ancient philosophers, creation from nothing appeared an unintelligible idea. They maintained the eternal existence of matter, which they supposed to be modelled by the sovereign mind of the universe, into the form which the earth now exhibits. But there is nothing in this opinion which gives it any title to be opposed to the authority of revelation. The doctrine of two self-existent, independent principles, God and matter, the one active, the other passive, is a hypothesis which presents difficulties to human reason, at least as great as the creation of matter from nothing. Adhering then to the testimony of Scripture, we believe, that *in the beginning God created*, or from non-existence brought into being, *the heaven, and the earth.*

But though there was a period when this globe, with all that we see upon it, did not exist, we have no reason to think, that the wisdom and power of the Almighty were then without exercise or employment. Boundless is the extent of his dominion. Other globes and worlds, enlightened by other suns, may then have occupied, they still appear to occupy, the immense regions of space. Numberless orders of beings, to us unknown, people the wide extent of the universe; and afford an endless variety of objects to the ruling care of the great Father of all. At length, in the course and progress of his government, there arrived a period, when this earth was to be called into existence. When the signal moment, predestined from all eternity, was come, the Deity arose in his might; and with a word created the world. — What an illustrious moment was that, when, from non-existence, there sprang at once into being this mighty globe, on which so many millions of creatures now dwell! — No preparatory measures were required. No long circuit of means were employed. *He spake; and it was done: He commanded; and it stood fast.* The earth was, at first, *without form, and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep.* The Almighty surveyed the dark abyss; and fixed bounds to the several divisions of nature. He said, *Let there be light; and there was light.* Then appeared the sea, and the dry land. The mountains rose; and the rivers flowed. The sun and moon began their course in the skies. Herbs and plants clothed the ground. The air, the earth, and the waters, were stored with their respective inhabitants. At last, man was made after the image of God. He appeared, walking with countenance erect; and received his Creator's benediction, as the Lord of this new world. The Almighty beheld his work when it was finished; and pronounced it good. Superiour beings saw with wonder this new accession to existence. *The morning stars sang together; and all the sons of God shouted for joy.**

But on this great work of Creation, let us not merely gaze with astonishment. Let us consider how it should affect our conduct, by presenting the divine perfections in a light which is at once edifying, and comforting to man. It displays the Creator as supreme in power, in wisdom, and in goodness.

I. As supreme in power. When we consider with how much labour and difficulty human power performs its inconsiderable works.

* Job, xxxviii. 7.

what time it costs to rear them; and how easily, when reared, they are destroyed; the very idea of creating power overwhelms the mind with awe. Let us look around, and survey this stupendous edifice, which we have been admitted to inhabit. Let us think of the extent of the different climates and regions of the earth; of the magnitude of the mountains, and of the expanse of the ocean. Let us conceive that immense globe which contains them, launched at once from the hand of the Almighty; made to revolve incessantly on its axis, that it might produce the vicissitudes of day and night; thrown forth, at the same time, to run its annual course in perpetual circuit through the heavens: After such a meditation, where is the greatness, where is the pride of man? Into what total annihilation do we sink, before an omnipotent Being? Who is not disposed to exclaim, *Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him; or the son of man, that thou shouldest visit him! When compared with thee, all men are vanity; their works are nothing!* — Reverence, and humble adoration, ought spontaneously to arise. He who feels no propensity to worship and adore, is dead to all sense of grandeur and majesty; has extinguished one of the most natural feelings of the human heart. *Know the Lord, that he is God, we are all his people; the workmanship of his hands. Let us worship and bow down. Let us kneel before the Lord our Maker.*

Of all titles to legislation and rule, none is so evident and direct as that of a Creator. The conviction is felt in every breast, that he who gave us being, hath an absolute right to regulate our conduct. This gives a sanction to the precepts of God, which the most hardened dare not controvert. When it is a Creator and a Father that speaks, who would not listen and obey? Are justice and humanity his declared laws; and shall we, whom but yesterday he called from the dust, and whom to-morrow he can reduce into dust again, presume, in contempt of him, to be unjust or inhuman? Are there any little interests of our own, which we dare to erect, in opposition to the pleasure of him who made us? *Fear ye not me? saith the Lord; will ye not tremble at my presence, who have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, that it cannot pass it; who stretch forth my hand over the earth, and none hindereth?*

At the same time, the power of a Creator is encouraging, as well as awful. While it enforces duty, it inspires confidence under affliction. It brings to view a relation, which imports tenderness and comfort; for it suggests the compassion of a Father. In the time of trouble, mankind are led, by natural impulse, to fly for aid to Him, who knows the weakness of the frame which he has made: who *remembers we are dust*; and sees the dangers with which we are environed. "I am thine; for thou hast made me: Forsake not the work of thine own hands," is one of the most natural ejaculations of the distressed mind. — How blessed are the virtuous, who can rest under the protection of that powerful arm, which made the earth and the heaven! The omnipotence which renders God so awful is to them a source of joy. In the whole compass of nature, nothing is formid- to them who firmly repose their trust in the Creator. To them,

every noxious power can be rendered harmless; every threatened evil, if not averted, can be transformed into good. In the Author of nature, they find not only the author of their being; but their protector and defender, the lifter up of their heads. *Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help; whose hope is in the Lord his God, which made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that therein is; which keepeth truth for ever.**

II. THE work of creation is the display of supreme wisdom. It carries no character more conspicuous than this. If, from the structure and mechanism of some of the most complicated works of human art, we are led to high admiration of the wisdom of the contriver, what astonishment may fill our minds, when we think of the structure of the universe! It is not only the stupendous building itself, which excites admiration; but the exquisite skill, with which the endless variety of its parts are adapted to their respective purposes. Inso-much that the study of nature, which, for ages, has employed the lives of so many learned men, and which is still so far from being exhausted, is no other than the study of divine wisdom displayed in the creation. The farther our researches are carried, more striking proofs of it every-where meet us. The provision made for the constant regularity of the universe, in the disposition of the heavenly bodies, so that in the course of several thousand years, nature should ever exhibit the same useful and grateful variety in the returns of light and darkness, of summer and winter; and ever furnish food and habitation to all the animals that people the earth; must be a lasting theme of wonder to every reflecting mind.

But they are not only the heavens that declare the glory of God, and the firmament that sheweth forth his handy-work. In the most inconsiderable, as well as in the most illustrious works of the Creator, consummate art and design appear. There is not a creature that moves, nor a vegetable that grows, but, when minutely examined, furnishes materials of the highest admiration. The same wisdom that placed the sun in the centre of the system, and arranged the several planets around him in their order, has no less shown itself, in the provision made for the food and dwelling of every bird that roams the air, and every beast that wanders in the desert; equally great, in the smallest, and in the most magnificent objects; in the star, and in the insect; in the elephant, and in the fly; in the beam that shines from heaven, and in the grass that clothes the ground. Nothing is overlooked. Nothing is carelessly performed. Every thing that exists is adapted, with perfect symmetry, to the end for which it was designed. All this infinite variety of particulars must have been present to the mind of the Creator; all beheld with one glance of his eye; all fixed and arranged, from the beginning, in his great design, when he formed the heavens and the earth. Justly may we exclaim with the Psalmist, *How excellent, O Lord, is thy name in all the earth! How manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all. No man can find out the work that God maketh,*

* Psalm cxxxvi, 6.

from the beginning to the end. Such knowledge is too wonderful for us. It is high; we cannot attain unto it.

This wisdom displayed by the Almighty in the creation, was not intended merely to gratify curiosity, and to raise wonder. It ought to beget profound submission, and pious trust, in every heart. It is not uncommon for many who speak with rapture of creating wisdom, to be guilty, at the same time, of arraigning the conduct of Providence. In the structure of the universe, they confess that all is goodly and beautiful. But, in the government of human affairs, they can see nothing but disorder and confusion. — Have they forgotten, that both the one and the other proceed from the same Author? Have they forgotten, that he who balanced all the heavenly bodies, and adjusted the proportions and limits of nature, is the same who hath allotted them their condition in the world, who distributes the measures of their prosperity and adversity, and *fixes the bounds of their habitation*? If their lot appear to them ill-sorted, and their condition hard and unequal, let them only put the question to their own minds, Whether it be most probable that the great and wise Creator hath erred in his distribution of human things, or that they have erred in the judgment which they form concerning the lot assigned to them? Can they believe, that the divine Artist, after he had contrived and finished this earth, the habitation of men, with such admirable wisdom, would then throw it out of his hands as a neglected work; would suffer the affairs of its inhabitants to proceed by chance; and would behold them, without concern, run into misrule and disorder? Where were then that consistency of conduct, which we discover in all the works of nature, and which we cannot but ascribe to a perfect Being? — My brother! when thy plans are disappointed, and thy heart is ready to despair; when virtue is oppressed, and the wicked prosper around thee; in those moments of disturbance, look up to Him who created the heaven and the earth; and confide, that he who made light to spring from primæval darkness, will make order at last to arise from the seeming confusion of the world.

Had any one beheld the earth in its state of chaos; when the elements lay mixed and confused; when the earth *was without form and void; and darkness was on the face of the deep*; would he have believed, that it was presently to become so fair and well-ordered a globe as we now behold; illumined with the splendour of the sun, and decorated with all the beauty of nature? The same powerful hand, which perfected the work of creation, shall, in due time, disembroil the plans of Providence. Of creation, we can judge more clearly, because it stood forth at once; it was perfect from the beginning. But the course of Providence is progressive. Time is required for the progression to advance, and before it is finished, we can form no judgment, or at least a very imperfect one, concerning it. We must wait until the great æra arrive, when the secrets of the universe shall be unfolded; when the divine designs shall be consummated; when Providence shall be brought to the same completion which creation has already attained. Then we have reason to be-

lieve, that the wise Creator shall appear, in the end, to have been the wise and just ruler of the world. Until that period comes, let us be contented and patient; let us submit and adore. *Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him.** This exhortation will receive more force, when we

III. CONSIDER creation as a display of supreme goodness, no less than of wisdom and power. It is the communication of numberless benefits to all who live, together with existence. Justly is the earth said to be *full of the goodness of the Lord*. Throughout the whole system of things, we behold a manifest tendency to promote the benefit either of the rational, or the animal creation. In some parts of nature, this tendency may be less obvious than in others. Objects, which to us seem useless or hurtful, may sometimes occur; and strange it were, if, in so vast and complicated a system, difficulties of this kind should not occasionally present themselves to beings, whose views are so narrow and limited as ours. It is well known, that in proportion as the knowledge of nature has increased among men, these difficulties have diminished. Satisfactory accounts have been given of many perplexing appearances. Useful and proper purposes have been found to be promoted, by objects which were, at first, thought unprofitable or noxious.

Malignant must be the mind of that person; with a distorted eye he must have contemplated creation, who can suspect, that it is not the production of infinite benignity and goodness. How many clear marks of benevolent intention appear every-where around us? What a profusion of beauty and ornament is poured forth on the face of nature? What a magnificent spectacle presented to the view of man? What supply contrived for his wants? What a variety of objects set before him, to gratify his senses, to employ his understanding, to entertain his imagination, to cheer and gladden his heart? Indeed, the very existence of the universe is a standing memorial of the goodness of the Creator. For nothing except goodness could originally prompt creation. The Supreme Being, self-existent and all-sufficient, had no wants which he could seek to supply. No new accession of felicity or glory was to result to him, from creatures whom he made. It was goodness communicating and pouring itself forth, goodness delighting to impart happiness in all its forms, which in the beginning created the heaven and the earth. Hence those innumerable orders of living creatures with which the earth is peopled; from the lowest class of sensitive being, to the highest rank of reason and intelligence. Wherever there is life, there is some degree of happiness; there are enjoyments suited to the different powers of feeling; and earth, and air, and water, are with magnificent liberality made to teem with life.

Let those striking displays of creating goodness call forth, on our part, responsive love, gratitude, and veneration. To this great Father of all existence and life, to Him who hath raised us up to behold the light of day, and to enjoy all the comforts which his world presents, let our hearts send forth a perpetual hymn of praise.

* Job. xxxv. 14.

Evening and morning let us celebrate Him, who *fill* the morning and the evening to rejoice over our heads; who *openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing*. Let us rejoice, that we are brought into a world, which is the production of infinite goodness, over which a supreme intelligence presides; and where nothing happens, that was not planned and arranged, from the beginning, in his decree. Convinced that he hateth not the works which he hath made, nor hath brought creatures into existence merely to suffer unnecessary pain, let us, even in the midst of sorrow, receive with calm submission whatever he is pleased to send; thankful for what he bestows; and satisfied, that without good reason he takes nothing away.

SUCH, in general, are the effects which meditation on the creation of the world ought to produce. It presents such an astonishing conjunction of power, wisdom, and goodness, as cannot be beheld without religious veneration. Accordingly, among all nations of the earth, it has given rise to religious belief and worship. The most ignorant and savage tribes, when they looked round on the earth and the heavens, could not avoid ascribing their origin to some invisible designing cause, and feeling a propensity to adore. They are, indeed, the awful appearances of the Creator's power, by which, chiefly, they have been impressed, and which have introduced into their worship so many rites of dark superstition. When the usual course of nature seemed to be interrupted, when loud thunder rolled above them in the clouds, or earthquakes shook the ground, the multitude fell on their knees, and, with trembling horror, brought forth the bloody sacrifice to appease the angry divinity. But it is not in those tremendous appearances of power merely, that a good and well-instructed man beholds the Creator of the world. In the constant and regular working of his hands, in the silent operations of his wisdom and goodness, ever going on throughout nature, he delights to contemplate and adore him.

This is one of the chief fruits to be derived from that more perfect knowledge of the Creator, which is imparted to us by the Christian revelation. Impressing our minds with a just sense of his attributes, as not wise and great only, but as gracious and merciful, let it lead us to view every object of calm and undisturbed nature, with a perpetual reference to its Author. We shall then behold all the scenes which the heavens and the earth present, with more refined feelings, and sublimer emotions, than they who regard them solely as objects of curiosity or amusement. Nature will appear animated and enlivened, by the presence of its Author. When the sun rises or sets in the heavens, when spring paints the earth, when summer shines in its glory, when autumn pours forth its fruits, or winter returns in its awful forms, we shall view the Creator manifesting himself in his works. We shall meet his presence in the fields. We shall feel his influence in the cheering beam. We shall hear his voice in the wind. We shall behold ourselves every-where surrounded with the glory of that universal spirit, who fills, pervades, and upholds all. We shall live in the world, as in a great and

august temple, where the presence of the divinity, who inhabits it, inspires devotion.

Magnificent as the fabric of the world is, it was not, however, intended for perpetual duration. It was erected as a temporary habitation for a race of beings, who, after acting there a probationary part, were to be removed into a higher state of existence. As there was an hour fixed from all eternity for its creation, so there is an hour fixed for its dissolution; when the heavens and the earth shall pass away, and their place shall know them no more. The consideration of this great event, as the counterpart to the work of creation, shall be the subject of the following Discourse.

SERMON L.

ON THE DISSOLUTION OF THE WORLD.

2 PETER, iii. 10.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth also, and the works that are therein, shall be burnt up.

THESE words present to us an awful view of the final catastrophe of the world. Having treated, in the preceding Discourse, of the commencement, let us now contemplate the close, of all human things. The dissolution of the material system is an article of our faith, often alluded to in the Old Testament, clearly predicted in the New. It is an article of faith so far from being incredible, that many appearances in nature lead to the belief of it. We see all terrestrial substances changing their form. Nothing that consists of matter, is formed for perpetual duration. Every thing around us is impaired and consumed by time, waxes old by degrees, and tends to decay. There is reason, therefore, to believe, that a structure so complex as the world must be liable to the same law; and shall, at some period, undergo the same fate. Through many changes, the earth has already passed; many shocks it has received, and is still often receiving. A great portion of what is now dry land appears, from various tokens, to have been once covered with water. Continents bear the marks of having been violently rent, and torn asunder from one another. New islands have risen from the bottom of the ocean, thrown up by the force of subterraneous fire. Formidable earthquakes have, in divers quarters, shaken the globe; and at this hour terrify, with their alarms, many parts of it. Burning mountains have, for ages, been discharging torrents of flame; and from time to time renew their explosions in various regions. All these circumstances show, that in the bowels of the earth the instruments of its dissolution are formed. To our view, who behold only its surface, it may appear firm and

unshaken; while its destruction is preparing in secret. The ground on which we tread is undermined. Combustible materials are stored. The train is laid. When the mine is to spring, none of us can foresee.

Accustomed to behold the course of nature proceeding in regular order, we indulge meanwhile our pleasures and pursuits with full security; and such awful scenes as the convulsion of the elements, and the dissolution of the world, are foreign to our thoughts. Yet as it is certain that some generation of men must witness this great catastrophe, it is fit and proper, that we should sometimes look forward to it. Such prospects may not, indeed, be alluring to the bulk of men. But they carry a grandeur and solemnity, which are congenial to some of the most dignified feelings in our nature; and tend to produce elevation of thought. Amidst the circle of levities and follies, of little pleasures and little cares, which fill up the ordinary round of life, it is necessary that we be occasionally excited to attend to what is serious and great. Such events as are now to be the subject of our meditation, awake the slumbering mind; check the licentiousness of idle thought; and bring home our recollection to what most concerns us, as men and Christians.

Let us think what astonishment would have filled our minds, and what devout emotions would have swelled our hearts, if we could have been spectators of the creation of the world; if we had seen the earth when it arose at first, *without form and void*, and beheld its parts arranged by the divine word; if we had heard the voice of the Almighty, calling light to spring forth from the *darkness that was on the face of the deep*; if we had seen the sun rising, for the first time, in the east with majestic glory; and all nature instantly beginning to teem with life. This wonderful scene, it was impossible that any human eye could behold. It was a spectacle afforded only to angels, and superiour spirits. But to a spectacle no less astonishing, the final dissolution of the world, we know there shall be many human witnesses. The race of men living in that last age, shall see the presages of the approaching fatal day. There shall be *signs in the sun*, as the Scripture informs us, *and signs in the moon and stars; upon the earth, distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring*.^{*} They shall clearly perceive, that universal nature is tending to ruin. They shall feel the globe shake; shall behold their cities fall; and the final conflagration begin to kindle around them. — Realising then this awful scene; imagining ourselves to be already spectators of it; let us,

I. CONTEMPLATE the Supreme Being directing the dissolution, as he directed the original formation, of the world. He is the great agent in this wonderful transaction. It was by him foreseen. It was by him intended; it entered into his plan from the moment of creation. This world was destined from the beginning to fulfil a certain period; and then its duration was to terminate. Not that it is any pleasure to the Almighty, to display his omnipotence in destroying the works which he has made; but as for wise and good pur-

^{*} Luke, xxi. 25.

poses the earth ~~was~~ ^{was} formed, for at wise and good ends it is dissolved, when the time most proper for its termination is come. He who, in the counsels of his Providence, brings about so many revolutions among mankind; who *changeth the times and the seasons*; who raises up empires to rule in succession among the nations, and at his pleasure puts an end to their glory; hath also fixed a term for the earth itself, the seat of all human greatness. He saw it meet, that after the probationary course was finished, which the generations of men were to accomplish, their present habitation should be made to pass away. Of the seasonableness of the period when this change should take place, no being can judge except the Lord of the universe. These are counsels, into which it is not ours to penetrate. But, amidst this great revolution of nature, our comfort is, that it is a revolution brought about by Him, the measures of whose government are all founded in goodness.

It is called in the Text, *the day of the Lord*; a day peculiarly his, as known to him only; a day in which he shall appear with uncommon and tremendous majesty. But though it be the day of the terrors of the Lord, yet from these terrors his upright and faithful subjects shall have nothing to apprehend. They may remain safe and quiet spectators of the threatening scene. For it is not to be a scene of blind confusion; of universal ruin, brought about by undesigning chance. Over the shock of the elements, and the wreck of matter, Eternal Wisdom presides. According to its direction, the conflagration advances which is to consume the earth. Amidst every convulsion of the world, God shall continue to be, as he was from the beginning, *the dwelling-place of his servants to all generations*. The world may be lost to them; but the Ruler of the world is ever the same, unchangeably good and just. This is the *high tower* to which they can fly, and be safe. *The righteous Lord loveth righteousness*; and, under every period of his government, *his countenance beholdeth the upright*.

II. Let us contemplate the dissolution of the world as the end of all human glory. This earth has been the theatre of many a great spectacle, and many a high achievement. There, the wise have ruled, the mighty have fought, and conquerors have triumphed. Its surface has been covered with proud and stately cities. Its temples and palaces have raised their heads to the skies. Its kings and potentates, glorying in their magnificence, have erected pyramids, constructed towers, founded monuments, which they imagined were to defy all the assaults of time. *Then inward thought was, that their houses were to continue for ever, and their dwelling-places to all generations*. Its philosophers have explored the secrets of nature; and flattered themselves, that the fame of their discoveries was to be immortal.—Alas! all this was to be no more than a transient show. Not only *the fashion of the world*, but the world itself, *passeth away*. The day cometh, when all the glory of this world shall be remembered only as *a dream when one awaketh*. No longer shall the earth exhibit any of those scenes which now delight our eyes. The whole beautiful fabric is thrown down, never more to arise. As soon as

the destroying angel has sounded the last trumpet, the everlasting mountains fall; the foundations of the world are shaken; the beauties of nature, the decorations of art, the labours of industry, perish in one common flame. The globe itself shall either return into its ancient chaos, *without form and void*; or, like a star fallen from the heavens, shall be effaced from the universe, and *its place shall know it no more*.

THIS day of the Lord, it is foretold in the Text, *will come as a thief in the night*; that is, sudden and unexpected. Mankind, notwithstanding the presages given them, shall continue to the last in their wonted security. Our Saviour tells us, that *as in the days of Noah before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be.** — How many projects and designs shall that day suddenly confound? What long-contrived schemes of pleasure shall it overthrow? What plans of cunning and ambition shall it utterly blast? How miserable they, whom it shall overtake in the midst of dark conspiracies, of criminal deeds, or profligate pleasures? In what strong colours is their dismay painted, when they are represented, in the book of Revelations, as calling to the hills and mountains to fall on them and cover them? — Such descriptions are apt to be considered as exaggerated. The impression of those awful events is weakened by the great distance of time, at which our imagination places them. But have not we had a striking image set before us, in our own age, of the terrors which the day of the Lord shall produce, by those partial ruins of the world, which the visitation of God has brought on countries well known, and not removed very far from ourselves? When, in the midst of peace, opulence, and security, suddenly the earth was felt by the terrified inhabitants to tremble, with violent agitation, below them; when their houses began to shake over their heads, and to overwhelm them with ruin; the flood, at the same time, to rise from its bed, and to swell around them; when encompassed with universal desolation, no friend could aid another; no prospect of escape appeared; no place of refuge remained; how similar were such scenes of destruction to the terrors of the last day? What similar sensations of dread and remorse, and too late repentance, must they have excited among the guilty and profane?

To such formidable convulsions of nature, we, in these happy islands, through the blessing of Heaven, are strangers; and strangers to them may we long continue! But however we may escape partial ruins of the globe, in its general and final ruin we also must be involved. To us must come at last that awful day, when the sun shall for the last time arise, to perform his concluding circuit round the world. They how blest, whom that day shall find employed in religious acts, or virtuous deeds; in the conscientious discharge of the duties of life; in the exercise of due preparation for the conclusion of human things, and for appearing before the great Judge of the world! Let us now,

* Matt. xxiv. 38, 39.

III. CONTEMPLE the world of man, as remaining unhurt in the midst of this general dissolution, when the whole animal creation perishes, and the whole frame of nature falls into ruins. What a high idea does this present, of the dignity pertaining to the rational spirit! The world may fall back into chaos; but, superiour to matter, and independent of all the changes of material things, the soul continues the same. When *the heavens pass away with a great noise, and the elements melt with fervent heat*, the soul of man, stamped for immortality, retains its state unimpaired, and is capable of flourishing in undecaying youth and vigour. Very different indeed the condition of human spirits is to be, according as their different qualities have marked, and prepared them, for different future mansions. But for futurity, they are all destined. Existence, still, is theirs. The capacity of permanent felicity they all possess; and if they enjoy it not, it is owing to themselves.

Here, then, let us behold what is the true honour and excellence of man. It consists not in his body; which, beautiful or vigorous as it may now seem, is no other than a fabric of dust, quickly to return to dust again. It is not derived from any connexion he can form with earthly things; which, as we have seen, are all doomed to perish. It consists in that thinking part, which is susceptible of intellectual improvement and moral worth; which was formed after the image of God; which is capable of perpetual progress in drawing nearer to his nature; and shall partake of the divine eternity, when time and the world shall be no more. This is all that is respectable in man. By this alone, he is raised above perishable substances, and allied to those that are celestial and immortal. This part of our nature, then, let us cultivate with care; and, on its improvement, rest our self-estimation. If, on the contrary, suffering ourselves to be wholly immersed in matter, plunged in the dregs of sensuality, we behave as if we were only made for the body and its animal pleasures, how degenerate and base do we become? Destined to survive this whole material system, sent forth to run the race of immortality and glory, shall we thus abuse our Maker's goodness, degrade our original honour, and sink ourselves into deserved misery? It remains, that,

IV. WE contemplate the dissolution of the world, as the introduction to a greater and nobler system, in the government of God. *We, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.** Temporal things are now to give place to things eternal. To this earthly habitation is to succeed the city of the living God. The earth had completed the purpose for which it was created. It had been employed as a theatre, on which the human generations were successively to come forth, and to fulfil their term of trial. As long as the period of trial continued, much obscurity was of course to cover the counsels of Providence. It was appointed, that *all things* should appear as *coming alike to all*; that the righteous should seem often neglected by Heaven, and the wicked be allowed externally to prosper; in order that virtue and piety might

undergo a proper test; that it might be shown who were sincere adherents to conscience, and who were mere followers of fortune. The day which terminates the duration of the world, terminates all those seeming disorders. The time of trial is concluded. The final discrimination of characters is made. When the righteous go into everlasting happiness, and the wicked are dismissed into the regions of punishment, the whole mystery of human affairs is unravelled, and the conduct of Providence is justified to man.

Suited to a condition of trial was the state and form of the world, which we now inhabit. It was not designed to be a mansion for innocent and happy spirits; but a dwelling for creatures of fallen nature, and of mixed characters. Hence, those mixtures of pleasure and pain, of disorder and beauty, with which it abounds. Hence, some regions of the earth, presenting gay and pleasing scenes; others, exhibiting nothing but ruggedness and deformity; the face of Nature, sometimes brightened by a serene atmosphere, and a splendid sun; sometimes disfigured by jarring elements, and overcast with troubled skies. But far unlike shall be the everlasting habitations of the just. Though how they are formed, or what objects they contain, is not given us now to conceive; nor, in all probability, would our faculties be equal to the conception; the emblematical descriptions of them in Scripture are calculated to excite high ideas of magnificence and glory. This one particular we know with certainty, that *therein dwelleth righteousness*; that is, complete virtue and eternal order; and wherever these are found, the most perfect sources are opened of joy and bliss. This earth was never intended for more than the outer court, the porch, through which the righteous were to pass into the temple and sanctuary of the Divinity. *When that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.*

THE inference which follows from what has been said on this subject, cannot be so well expressed as in the words of the Apostle, in the verse immediately following the Text; *Seeing that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?* Ought not the important discoveries which have been made to us of the designs of the Almighty, and of the destiny of man, to exalt our sentiments, and to purify our life from what is vicious or vain? While we pursue the business and cares of our present station, and partake of the innocent pleasures which the world affords, let us maintain that dignity of character which becomes immortal beings; let us act with that circumspection which becomes those who know they are soon to stand before the judgment-seat of the Son of God: In a word, let us study to be what we would wish to be found, if to us the day of the Lord should come.

I KNOW it will occur, that the prospect of that day cannot be expected to have much influence on the present age. The events of which I have treated, must needs, it will be said, belong to some future race of men. Many prophecies yet remain to be fulfilled. Many preparatory events must take place, before the world is ripe for final judgment. — Whether this be the case or not, none of us with certainty know. — But allow me to remind you, that to each of

us an event is approaching, and not far distant, which shall prove of the same effect with the coming of the day of the Lord. The day of death is, to every individual, the same as the day of the dissolution of the world. The sun may continue to shine; but to them who are laid in the grave, his light is finally extinguished. The world may remain active, busy, and noisy; but to them all is silence. The voice which gives the mandate, *Return again to your dust*, is the same with the sound of the last trumpet. Death fixes the doom of every one, finally and irrevocably. This surely is an event which none of us can remove in our thoughts to a remote age. To-morrow, to-day, the fatal mandate may be issued. *Watch, therefore; be sober and vigilant; ye know not at what hour the Son of Man cometh.*

HAVING now treated both of the creation and dissolution of the world, I cannot conclude without calling your thoughts to the magnificent view, which these events give us, of the kingdom and dominion of the Almighty. With reverence we contemplate his hand in the signal dispensations of Providence among men; deciding the fate of battles; raising up, or overthrowing empires; casting down the proud, and lifting the low from the dust. But what are such occurrences to the power and wisdom which He displays in the higher revolutions of the universe; by his word, forming or dissolving worlds; at his pleasure, transplanting his creatures from one world to another; that he may carry on new plans of wisdom and goodness, and fill all space with the wonders of creation? Successive generations of men have arisen to possess the earth. By turns they have passed away, and gone into regions unknown. Us he hath raised up, to occupy their room. We too shall shortly disappear. But human existence never perishes. Life only changes its form, and is renewed. Creation is ever filling, but never full. When the whole intended course of the generations of men shall be finished, then, as a shepherd leads his flock from one pasture to another, so the great Creator leads forth the souls which he has made, into new and prepared abodes of life. They go from this earth to a new earth, and new heavens; and still they remove, only from one province of the divine dominion to another. Amidst all those changes of nature, the great Ruler himself remains *without variableness or shadow of turning*. To him, these successive revolutions of being are but *as yesterday when it is past*. From his eternal throne, he beholds worlds rising and passing away; measures out, to the creatures who inhabit them, powers and faculties suited to their state; and distributes among them rewards and punishments proportioned to their actions. — What an astonishing view do such meditations afford of the kingdom of God; infinite in its extent; everlasting in its duration; exhibiting, in every period, the reign of perfect righteousness and wisdom! *Who by searching can find out God? who can find out the Almighty to perfection? Great and marvellous are all thy works, Lord God Almighty! Just and true are all thy ways, thou King of saints!*

SERMON II.

ON THE CAUSES OF MEN'S BEING WEARY OF LIFE.

JOB, x. 1.

My soul is weary of my life.

JOB, in the first part of his days, was *the greatest of all the men of the East*. His possessions were large; his family was numerous and flourishing; his own character was fair and blameless. Yet this man it pleased God to visit with extraordinary reverses of fortune. He was robbed of his whole substance. His sons and daughters all perished; and he himself, fallen from his high estate, childless, and reduced to poverty, was smitten with sore disease. His friends came about him, seemingly with the purpose of administering comfort. But, from a harsh and ill-founded construction of the intention of Providence in his disasters, they only added to his sorrows by unjust upbraiding. Hence those many pathetic lamentations with which this book abounds, poured forth in the most beautiful and touching strain of Oriental poetry. In one of those hours of lamentation, the sentiment in the Text was uttered; *My soul is weary of my life*; a sentiment, which surely, if any situation can justify it, was allowable in the case of Job.

In situations very different from that of Job, under calamities far less severe, it is not uncommon to find such a sentiment working in the heart, and sometimes breaking forth from the lips of men. Many, very many there are, who, on one occasion or other, have experienced this weariness of life, and been tempted to wish that it would come to a close. Let us now examine in what circumstances this feeling may be deemed excusable; in what it is to be held sinful; and under what restrictions we may, on any occasion, be permitted to say, *My soul is weary of my life*.

I SHALL consider the words of the Text in three lights: as expressing, *First*, The sentiment of a discontented man: *Secondly*, The sentiment of an afflicted man: *Thirdly*, The sentiment of a devout man.

I. LET us consider the Text as expressing the sentiment of a discontented man; with whom it is the effusion of spleen, vexation, and dissatisfaction with life, arising from causes neither laudable nor justifiable. There are chiefly three classes of men who are liable to this disease of the mind: the idle; the luxurious; the criminal.

First, THIS weariness of life is often found among the idle; persons commonly in easy circumstances of fortune, who are not engaged in any of the laborious occupations of the world, and who are, at the same time, without energy of mind to call them forth into any other line of active exertion. In this languid, or rather torpid state, they have so many vacant hours, and are so much at a loss how to fill up their time, that their spirits utterly sink; they become burdened with themselves, and to every one around them; and drag with them the load of existence. What a convincing proof is hereby afforded, that man was designed by his Creator to be an active being,

whose happiness is to be found not merely in rest, but in occupation and pursuit ! The idle are doomed to suffer the natural punishment of their inactivity and folly ; and from their complaints of the tiresomeness of life, there is no remedy but to awake from the dream of sloth, and to fill up with proper employment the miserable vacancies of their days. Let them study to become useful to the world, and they shall soon become less burdensome to themselves. They shall begin to enjoy existence ; they shall reap the rewards which Providence has annexed to virtuous activity ; and have no more cause to say, *My soul is weary of my life.*

Next, THE luxurious and the dissipated form another class of men, among whom such complaints are still more frequent. With them they are not the fruit of idleness. These are men who have been busied enough ; they have run the whole race of pleasure ; but they have run it with such inconsiderate speed, that it terminates in weariness and vexation of spirit. By the perpetual course of dissipation in which they are engaged ; by the excesses which they indulge ; by the riotous revel, and the midnight, or rather morning, hours to which they prolong their festivity ; they have debilitated their bodies, and worn out their spirits. Satiated with the repetition of their accustomed pleasures, and yet unable to find any new ones in their place ; wandering round and round their former haunts of joy, and ever returning disappointed ; weary of themselves, and of all things about them, their spirits are oppressed with a deadly gloom, and the complaint bursts forth of odious life and a miserable world. Never are these complaints more frequent than at the close of rounds of amusement, and after a long repetition of festal pleasures ; when the spirits which had been forced up, as by some intoxicating drug, to an unnatural height, subside into profound dejection. What increases the evil is, that it is not among the infirm and the aged, but among the young, the gay, and the prosperous, who ought to be reputed the happiest men, that this distaste of life most frequently prevails.

When persons of this description, in their peevish and splenetic hours, exclaim, *My soul is weary of my life*, let them know, let them be assured, that this is no other than the judgment of God overtaking them for their vices and follies. Their complaints of misery are entitled to no compassion ; nay, they are sinful, because they arise from a sinful cause ; from a mind broken and debased by luxury and corruption. They are the authors of their own misery, by having thrown away on the follies of the world those powers which God had bestowed on them for nobler ends.—Let them return to the duties of men and Christians. Let them retreat from frivolity, and abstain from excess. Let them study temperance, moderation, and self-command. By entering on a virtuous and manly course of action, and applying to the honourable discharge of the functions of their station, they will acquire different views. They will obtain more real enjoyment of life, and become more willing to prolong it.—But, after the warnings which God has given them of their misbehaviour by the inward misery they suffer, if they still continue to run the same intemperate round, and to drain pleasure to

the last dregs, it shall come to pass, that they who now condemn life, and are impatient of its continuance, shall be the persons most eager to prolong it. When they behold it in reality drawing towards a close, and are obliged to look forward to what is to come after it, they shall be rendered awfully sensible of its value. They will then grasp eagerly at the flying hours; anxious to stop them if they could, and to employ every moment that remains in repairing their past errors, and in making their peace, if possible, with God and heaven. According as *they have sown, they now reap*. They are reduced to *eat the fruit of their own ways, and to be filled with their own devices*.

THERE remains still a third class of those who from discontent are become weary of life; such as have embittered it to themselves by the consciousness of criminal deeds. They have been, perhaps, unnatural to their parents, or treacherous to their friends; they have violated their fidelity; have ensnared and ruined the innocent; or have occasioned the death of others. There is no wonder that such persons should lose their relish for life. To whatever arts they may have recourse for procuring a deceitful peace, conscience will at times exert its native power, and shake over them its terrific scourge. The internal misery they endure has sometimes arisen to such a height, as has made them terminate, with their own hands, an existence which they felt to be insupportable. — To the complaints of such persons no remedy can be furnished, except what arises from the bitterness of sincere and deep repentance. We can do no more than exhort them to atone as much as is in their power for the evils they have committed; and to fly to the divine mercy through Jesus Christ for pardon and forgiveness. Let us now,

II. TURN to persons of another description, and consider the sentiment in the Text as extorted by situations of distress. These are so variously multiplied in the world, and often so oppressive and heavy, that assuredly it is not uncommon to hear the afflicted complain that they are weary of life. Their complaints, if not always allowable, yet certainly are more excusable than those which flow from the sources of dissatisfaction already mentioned. They are sufferers, not so much through their own misconduct, as through the appointment of Providence; and therefore to persons in this situation it may seem more needful to offer consolation, than to give admonition. However, as the evils which produce this impatience of life are of different sorts, a distinction must be made as to the situations which can most excuse it.

SOMETIMES, the exclamation in the Text may be occasioned by deep and overwhelming grief. When they whom we had most affectionately loved, and in whom we had placed the felicity of our days, are taken away, our connexion with life appears to be dissolved. "Why should we survive those to whom our souls were tied? Would to God we had died before them! Now when they are gone, all pleasure and hope is gone as to us. To us the sun no longer shines with its usual brightness. No longer cheerfulness rests the face of Nature. On every object a sad gloom appears; and every employment of life is become an oppressive

"burden." With the feelings of those who are thus distressed we naturally sympathise. They are frequently the feelings of the most virtuous and amiable minds. And yet such persons must be told, that grief may be indulged so far as to become immoderate and improper. There are bounds which are prescribed to it both by reason and by religion. A Christian ought not to *mourn like those who have no hope*. While he feels his sorrows as a man, he should also study to bear them like a man, with fortitude; and not abandon himself to feeble and fruitless melancholy. Let him have recourse to a strenuous discharge of the duties of his station, and consider it as incumbent on him to make the best improvement that he can of those comforts which Providence has still left in his possession.

AGAIN; it sometimes happens that, apart from grief, great reverses of worldly fortune give rise to the lamentation in the Text. This was the case with Job himself. A sudden fall from opulence into indigence and want; some undeserved disgrace incurred, or some unexpected cloud thrown over former reputation and fame; the unkindness and desertion of friends, or the insolent triumph of enemies, are apt to overwhelm the minds of men with gloom, and to reduce them to be weary of life. To persons under such calamities, sympathy is due. That sympathy, however, will be proportioned to the degree in which we consider them as free from blame in the misfortunes which they suffer. As far as, through their own misconduct and vice, they have been the authors to themselves of those misfortunes, we withdraw our pity. The burden which they have brought on themselves, we leave them to bear as they can; and with little concern we hear them exclaim that their *souls are weary of life*. — Not only so, but even in cases where calamities have fallen on the innocent, to the pity which we feel for them will be joined a secret contempt, if we perceive that, together with their prosperity, their courage and fortitude have also forsaken them. To abandon themselves to dejection, carries no mark of a great or a worthy mind. Instead of declaring that his *soul is weary of his life*, it becomes a brave and a good man, in the evil day, with firmness to maintain his post; to bear up against the storm; to have recourse to those advantages which, in the worst of times, are always left to integrity and virtue; and never to give up the hope that better days may yet arise.

It is good for persons in such situations to remark that, though Job was for a long while severely tried by a variety of distresses, yet his condition was not left finally unhappy. On the contrary, the goodness of that God whom he had served, returned at last to shine upon him with greater brightness than ever. His riches were restored to him twofold. The losses in his family were repaired by a new offspring. His name became again renowned in the East; and the *latter end of Job*, we are told, *was more blessed than the beginning*.

BUT still, it may be asked, will not the continuance of long and severe disease justify the exclamation in the Text, *My soul is weary of my life*? To persons who are forsaken by all the blessings of health, and who have no prospect left, but that of lingering under

sickness or pain, Job's complaint may assuredly be forgiven more than to any others. Though it might be suggested to them, that even in old age and sickness, except in very extreme cases, no resources are always left, of which they may avail themselves for relief; yet it must be admitted, that lawfully they may wish their sufferings to be brought to an end. Still, however, they must remember, that resignation to the pleasure of Heaven continues to be their duty to the last. As long as any part remains to be acted, as long as their continuance in the world can serve any valuable purpose, it is more honourable to bear the load with magnanimity, than to give way to a querulous and dejected spirit. It remains,

III. To address myself to another order of men, among whom, though more rarely than among those whom I have described, the sentiment of the Text is to be found. They are persons who have no particular complaint to make of the injustice of the world, or the afflictions of their state. But they are tired of the vanity of the world, of its insipid enjoyments, and its perpetually revolving circle of trifles and follies. They feel themselves made for something greater and nobler. They are disgusted and hurt with the scenes of wickedness that are often passing before their eyes. Their hearts are warmed with the thoughts of a purer and more perfect existence designed for man; and in the moments of aspiration after it, the exclamation breaks forth, *My soul is weary of my life. — Oh, that I had wings like a dove! for then I would fly away and be at rest. Lo! then I would wander far off, and remain in the wilderness. I would hasten my escape from the windy storm and tempest. For I have seen violence and strife in the city. Wickedness is in the midst thereof; deceit and guile depart not from her streets.** In this view the sentiment in the Text may sometimes be that of a devout man. But such persons I must admonish, that their devotion, however sincere, is not altogether of a rational and chastened kind. It was from this temper that, in former ages of the church, the numerous race sprung of anchorets, hermits, and all the various orders who voluntarily abandoned the world, to people the lonely deserts and the monastic retreat. The ordinary course of things seemed below them as candidates for heaven. The concerns of the world appeared unworthy of their attention, and dangerous to their virtue. Breathing after a higher state, they imagined that they could not abstract themselves too much from every earthly amusement, as long as they were forced to remain in this place of exile.

Let us beware of all such imaginary refinements as produce a total disrelish of our present condition. They are, for the most part, grafted either on disappointed pursuits, or on a melancholy and splenetic cast of mind. They are far from contributing to happiness, and are inconsistent with all the active virtues of man. This life deserves not indeed to be put in competition with that blessed immortality to which God has raised our hopes. But such as it is, it is the gift of God. It is the sphere in which his wisdom has placed us, and appointed us to act our parts. As long as it lasts, we must neither

* Psalm lv. 6—9. 11.

slight the duties which it requires, nor undervalue the innocent enjoyment which it offers. It belongs to a man to live among men as his brethren; which he who declares himself weary of life is not qualified to do with propriety.

Thus I have placed before you, in various views, the sentiment in the Text; and have shown in what circumstances, and from what causes, that disrelish of life arises which is often found among mankind. On a review of the whole, we cannot but acknowledge, that it is oftener to be ascribed to our own vices and follies, than to any other cause. Among the multitudes in the world, to whom at this day life is burdensome, the far greater number is of those who have rendered it so to themselves. Their idleness, their luxury and pleasures, their criminal deeds, their immoderate passions, their timidity and baseness of mind, have dejected them in such a degree, as to make them weary of their existence. Preyed upon by discontent of their own creating, they complain of life when they ought to reprehend themselves.

Various afflictions there doubtless are in the world; many persons with whom we have cause to sympathise, and whom we might reasonably forgive for wishing death to close their sorrows. But of the evils which embitter life, it must be admitted, that the greater part is such as we have brought on ourselves; or at least such as, if we were not wanting to ourselves, might be tolerably supported. When we compute the numbers of those who are disposed to say, *My soul is weary of my life*, some there are to whom this sentiment is excusable; but many more among whom it is in no way justifiable. I admit that, among the worthiest and the best, there may be dark moments in which some feeling of this nature may be apt to intrude upon their minds. But with them they are only moments of occasional and passing gloom. They soon recal the vigour of their minds; and return with satisfaction to the discharge of the duties, and to a participation of the enjoyments, of life.

One great cause of men's becoming weary of life is grounded on the mistaken views of it which they have formed, and the false hopes which they have entertained from it. They have expected a scene of enjoyment; and when they meet with disappointments and distresses, they complain of life, as if it had cheated and betrayed them. God ordained no such possession for man on earth as continued pleasure. For the wisest purposes he designed our state to be checkered with pleasure and pain. As such let us receive it, and make the best of what is doomed to be our lot. Let us remain persuaded, that simple and moderate pleasures are always the best; that virtue and a good conscience are the surest foundations of enjoyment; that he who serves his God and his Saviour with the purest intentions, and governs his passions with the greatest care, is likely to lead the happiest life. Following these principles, we shall meet with fewer occasions of being weary of life; we shall always find some satisfaction mixed with its crosses; and shall be enabled to wait with a humble and contented mind, till the Almighty, in his appointed time, finish our state of trial, and remove us to a more blessed abode.

SERMON LII.

ON CHARITY AS THE END OF THE COMMANDMENT.

1 TIM. i. 5.

Now the end of the commandment is charity, out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned.

It appears from this chapter, that one design of the Apostle in writing to Timothy, was to guard him against certain corrupters of Christian doctrine, who had already arisen in the church. To their false representations of religion, he opposes that general view of it which is given in the Text. Such summaries of religion frequently occur in the sacred writings, and are extremely useful. By the comprehensive energy with which they express the great lines of our duty, they both imprint them on our memory, and bring them home to our conscience with force. In the progress of this Discourse, I hope to make it appear, that the words of the Text afford a most enlarged and instructive view of religion in all its chief parts.

The Apostle pronounces charity to be *the end* or scope of the commandment, that is, of the law of God. At the same time, in order to prevent mistakes on this most important subject, he subjoins to charity certain adjuncts, as necessary to qualify it, and to render the Christian character complete. These are, the *pure heart*, the *good conscience*, and *faith unfeigned*. In treating of these, I shall show the nature of their connexion with charity, and the importance of their being always united with it.

The end of the commandment is charity. Charity is the same with benevolence or love; and is the term uniformly employed in the New Testament, to denote all the good affections which we ought to bear towards one another. It consists not in speculative ideas of general benevolence floating in the head, and leaving the heart, as speculations too often do, untouched and cold. Neither is it confined to that indolent good nature, which makes us rest satisfied with being free from inveterate malice, or ill-will to our fellow-creatures, without prompting us to be of service to any. True charity is an active principle. It is not properly a single virtue; but a disposition residing in the heart, as a fountain whence all the virtues of benignity, candour, forbearance, generosity, compassion, and liberality flow, as so many native streams. From general good-will to all, it extends its influence particularly to those with whom we stand in nearest connexion, and who are directly within the sphere of our good offices. From the country or community to which we belong, it descends to the smaller associations of neighbourhood, relations, and friends; and spreads itself over the whole circle of social and domestic life. I mean not that it imports a promiscuous undistinguishing affection, which gives every man an equal title to our love. Charity, if we should endeavour to carry it so far, would be rendered an impracticable virtue, and would resolve itself into mere words, without affect-

ing the heart. True charity attempts not to shut our eyes to the distinction between good and bad men; nor to warm our hearts equally to those who befriend and those who injure us. It reserves our esteem for good men, and our complacency for our friends. Towards our enemies it inspires forgiveness and humanity. It breathes universal candour, and liberality of sentiment. It forms gentleness of temper, and dictates affability of manners. It prompts corresponding sympathies with them who rejoice and them who weep. It teaches us to slight and despise no man. •Charity is the comforter of the afflicted, the protector of the oppressed, the reconciler of differences, the intercessor for offenders. It is faithfulness in the friend, public spirit in the magistrate, equity and patience in the judge, moderation in the sovereign, and loyalty in the subject. In parents it is care and attention; in children it is reverence and submission. In a word, it is the soul of social life. It is the sun that enlivens and cheers the abodes of men. It is like the dew of Hermon, says the Psalmist, and the dew that descendeth on the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.*

SUCH charity, says the Text, is *the end of the commandment*. This assertion of the Apostle is undoubtedly consonant to all that reason can suggest on the subject of religion. For, on considering the nature of the Supreme Being, reason gives us much ground to believe, that the chief design of all the commandments which he has given to men, is to promote their happiness. Independent and self-sufficient, that Supreme Being has nothing to exact from us for his own interest or felicity. By our services he cannot be benefited, nor by our offences injured. When he created the world, it was benevolence that moved him to confer existence. When he made himself known to his creatures, benevolence in like manner moved him to give them laws for their conduct. Benevolence is the spring of legislation in the Deity, as much as it was the motive of creation. He issued his commands on earth, on purpose that, by obedience to them, his creatures might be rendered happy among themselves in this life, and be prepared for greater happiness in another. Charity, especially when joined with purity, good conscience, and faith, is obviously the great instrument for this purpose; and therefore must needs possess the chief and primary place in the laws of God.

Accordingly, throughout the New Testament, it is uniformly presented to us in the same light in which it is placed by the Text. This is known to all who have any acquaintance with the sacred books. Charity is termed *the fulfilling of the law*, and *the bond of perfectness*. It was assumed by our Blessed Lord as the characteristic distinction of his disciples; and in that magnificent eulogium which the Apostle Paul pronounces upon it, in the thirteenth chapter of the first epistle to the Corinthians, it is expressly preferred by him to *faith* and *hope*. This deserves to be seriously considered by those who are apt to undervalue charity, as an appendage of what they contemptuously call Morality; while they confine true religion to some favourite tenets and observances of their own, which they consider as compre-

* Psalm cxxxiii. 3.

hending the sum of what is acceptable to God. Such persons show themselves profoundly ignorant of the nature of religion, and may too often be suspected of being strangers to its influence. For, as the Apostle John reasons, *He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love that God whom he hath not seen?**

At the same time, while I ascribe to charity that high place in the system of religion, which justly belongs to it, I am not to be understood as confining all religion to this disposition alone. With much wisdom and propriety, the Text hath annexed to it certain adjuncts, without which neither the character of a good man can be completed, nor charity itself exercised to advantage. To the consideration of these, I now proceed; and I enter the more readily on this branch of the subject, as there is ground to believe, that many pretend to possess charity, without properly understanding its nature and efficacy. There has been always an unhappy tendency among men to run to extremes, on one side or other, in matters of religion. As one set of men, who employ all their zeal on right belief, are prone to undervalue good practice; so another set, who wish to be esteemed rational Christians, are inclined to rest the whole of their duty on charitable deeds, while they overlook certain dispositions and habits which ought always to accompany them. It is therefore of importance, that the mistakes of both these classes of men should be rectified, in order that religion may be held forth to the world in its complete form, and in its full and undiminished lustre.

The first qualification of charity pointed out in the Text is purity; *charity out of a pure heart*. Purity includes the virtues which belong to the individual, considered in himself, and with respect to the government of his desires and pleasures. It hath its seat in the heart; but extends its influence over so much of the outward conduct, as to form a great and material part of the character. They are only the *pure in heart*, we are told by our Saviour, *who can see God*.† It is also true, that they are only the *pure in heart* who can properly discharge their duties towards mankind. Inordinate love of pleasure, intemperance, sensuality, and a course of irregular life, are inconsistent, not only with the general character of a good man, but also with the peculiar exercises of charity and benevolence. For nothing is more certain, than that habits of licentious indulgence contribute to stifle all the good affections; to harden the heart; to nourish that selfish attachment to our own vicious pleasures which renders us insensible to the circumstances and wants of others. A profligate man is seldom found to be a good husband, a good father, or a beneficent neighbour. How many young persons have at first set out in the world with excellent dispositions of heart; generous, charitable, and humane; kind to their friends, and amiable among all with whom they had intercourse? And yet how often have we seen all those fair appearances unhappily blasted in the progress of life, merely through the influence of loose and corrupting pleasures; and those very persons who promised once to be blessings to the world, sunk down in the end, to be the burden and nuisance of

* 1 John, iv. 20.

† Matt. v. 8.

society! The profusion of expence which their pleasures occasion, accounts in a great measure for the fatal reverse that takes place in their character. It not only drains the sources whence the streams of beneficence should flow, but often obliges them to become oppressive and cruel to those whom it was their duty to have patronised and supported.

Purity of heart and conduct must therefore be held fundamental to charity and love, as well as to general piety and virtue. The licentious, I know, are ready to imagine, that their occasional deeds of bounty and liberality will atone for many of their private disorders. But, besides that such plans of compensation for vices, by some supposed virtues, are always fallacious, the licentious may be assured, that it is an appearance only of charity, not the reality of it, to which they can lay claim. For that great virtue consists not in occasional actions of humanity, in fits of kindness or compassion, to which bad men may be prompted by natural instinct; but in the steady and regular exercise of those good affections, and the discharge of those important duties towards others, for which the licentious are in a great measure disqualified. Their criminal propensities direct their inclinations to very different objects and pursuits; and often determine them to sacrifice the just rights of others, sometimes to sacrifice the peace and the reputation of the innocent, to the gratification of their passions. Such is the pernicious influence which the love of pleasure has on the good qualities of its devoted votaries. The impure heart is like the stagnant and putrefying lake, which sends forth its poisonous exhalations to corrupt and wither every plant that grows on its banks.

THE second qualification annexed to charity in the Text is, that it be *of a good conscience*. By this I understand the Apostle to mean, that charity be in full consistency with justice and integrity; that the *conscience* of the man who purposes to perform actions of benevolence, be free from the reproach of having neglected the primary duties of equity. For, undoubtedly, justice is a virtue primary to charity; that is, it must go before it in all its exertions. One must first *do justly*, before he can pretend that he *loves mercy*. — Religion, my friends, in order to render it useful to mankind, must be brought down by its teachers from the sublimity of speculation to the functions and occupations of ordinary life. It is my duty to admonish you, that you must, in the first place, be fair in all your dealings with others; you must discharge the debts you owe; you must pay the wages due to your servants and dependants; you must provide for your own family, and be just to the claims of relations; then, and then only, you can, *from a good conscience*, as the Text enjoins, perform acts of generosity and mercy.

This leads to a reflection which here deserves our attention; that, in order to fulfil that *charity which is the end of the commandment*, economy, and good order in private life, ought to be carefully studied by all Christians. This is more closely connected with a *good conscience*, than many seem inclined to admit. Economy, when prudently and temperately conducted, is the safeguard of many vir-

tues; and is in a particular manner favourable to the exertions of benevolence. He who by inconsiderate conduct is injuring his circumstances, will probably in time lose the inclination, and certainly is depriving himself of the means, of being serviceable to his brethren. Some important exertions, indeed, there are of charity, which have no connexion with giving or bestowing. Candour, forgiveness, gentleness, and sympathy, are due to our brethren at all times, and in every situation of our own fortune. The poor have opportunities for displaying these virtues, as well as the rich. They who have nothing to give, can often afford relief to others, by imparting what they feel. But, as far as beneficence is included in charity, we ought always to remember, that justice must, in the first place, be held inviolably sacred.

The wisdom of Scripture remarkably appears, in the connexion pointed out by the Text between *charity* and *good conscience*, or integrity; a connexion which I apprehend is often not attended to so much as it deserves. Among the frugal and industrious, great regard is commonly paid to justice. They will not defraud. They will not take any unlawful advantage in their dealings; and, satisfied with this degree of *good conscience*, they are strangers to that charity which is the *end of the commandment*. They are hard and unfeeling. They are rigid and severe in their demands. They know nothing of humanity, forgiveness, or compassion. — Among another class of men, who have been more liberally educated, and who are generally of a higher rank in life, justice is apt to be considered as a virtue less noble than charity; and which may, on some occasions, be dispensed with. They are humane, perhaps, and tender in their feelings. They are easy to their dependants. They can be liberal, even to profusion. While, at the same time, they are accumulating debts, which they know themselves unable to discharge. Their affairs are allowed to run into confusion. Economy and good order are neglected. The innocent, in great numbers, suffer materially through their mismanagement: And all the while they assume to themselves the praise of being generous and good-hearted men. This surely is not that *charity* which the Gospel enjoins; and which, in its very essence, involves *good conscience* and integrity. He who pretends to do good to his brethren, without first doing them justice, cannot be accounted their real friend. True charity is not a meteor, which occasionally glares: but a luminary, which, in its orderly and regular course, dispenses a benignant influence.

THE third and last adjunct connected in the Text with charity is, that it be of *faith unfeigned*. Faith, in the Scripture sense of it, includes the whole of religious principles respecting God, and respecting Christ. Good principles, without good practice, I confess, are nothing; they are of no avail in the sight of God, nor in the estimation of wise men. But practice not founded on principle, is likely to be always unstable and wavering; and, therefore, the faith of religious principles enters, for a very considerable share, into the proper discharge of the duties of charity.

It will be admitted that, without faith, our duties towards God

cannot be properly performed. You may be assured that your duties towards men will always greatly suffer from the want of it. Faith, when pure and genuine, supplies to every part of virtue, and in particular to the virtue of charity, many motives and assistances, of which the unbeliever is destitute. He who acts from faith, acts upon the high principle of regard to the God who hath made him, and to the Saviour who redeems him; which will often stimulate him to his duty, when other principles of benevolence become faint and languid, or are crossed by opposite interests. When he considers himself as pursuing the approbation of that Divine Being, from whom love descends, a sacred enthusiasm both prompts and consecrates his charitable dispositions. Regardless of men, or of human recompence, he is carried along by a higher impulse. He acts with the spirit of a follower of the Son of God, who not only has enjoined love, but has enforced it by the example of laying down his life for mankind. Whatever he does in behalf of his fellow-creatures, he considers himself as doing, in some degree, to that divine Person, who hath said, *Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.* * Hence charity is with him not only a moral virtue, but a Christian grace. It acquires additional dignity and energy from being connected with the heavenly state and the heavenly inhabitants. He mingles with beings of a higher order, while he is discharging his duty to his fellow-creatures on earth; and, by joining faith and piety to good works, he completes the character of a Christian.

Thus I have endeavoured to explain the full sense of that comprehensive view of religion which is given in the Text. I have shown in what respects *charity*, joined with *the pure heart, the good conscience, and faith unfeigned*, forms *the end of the commandment*. Let us ever keep in view those essential parts of a virtuous character, and preserve them in their proper union. Thus shall our religion rise into a regular and well-proportioned edifice, where each part gives firmness and support to another. If any one of those material parts be wanting in the structure; if, out of our system of charity, either purity, or justice, or faith, be left, there will be cracks and flaws in the building which prepare its ruin.

This is indeed one of the greatest and most frequent errors of men in their moral conduct. They take hold of virtue by pieces and corners only. Few are so depraved as to be without all sense of duty, and all regard to it. To some moral qualities, which appear to them amiable or estimable, almost all men lay claim; and on these they rest their worth, in their own estimation. But these scattered pieces of virtue, not uniting into one whole, nor forming a consistent character, have no powerful influence on their general habits of life. From various unguarded quarters they lie open to temptation. Their lives are full of contradiction, and perpetually fluctuate between good and evil. Virtue can neither rise to its native dignity, nor attain its proper rewards, until all its chief parts be joined together in our character, and exert an equal authority in regulating our conduct.

* Matt. xxv. 40.

SERMON LIII.

ON OUR LIVES BEING IN THE HAND OF GOD.

[Preached at the beginning of a New Year, Jan. 6. 1793.]

PSALM xxxi. 15.

My times are in thy hand.

THE sun that rolls over our heads, the food that we receive, the rest that we enjoy, daily admonish us of a superiour power, on whom the inhabitants of the earth depend for light, life, and subsistence. But as long as all things proceed in their ordinary course; when day returns after day with perfect similarity; when our life seems stationary, and nothing occurs to warn us of any approaching change, the religious sentiments of dependence are apt to be forgotten. The great revolutions of time, when they come round in their stated order, have a tendency to force some impressions of piety even on the most unthinking minds. They both mark our existence on earth to be advancing towards its close, and exhibit our condition as continually changing; while each returning year brings along with it new events, and at the same time carries us forwards to the conclusion of all. We cannot, on such occasions, avoid perceiving, that there is a Supreme Being, who holds in his hands the line of our existence, and measures out to each of us our allotted portion of that line. Beyond a certain limit, we know that it cannot be extended; and long before it reach that limit, it may be cut asunder by an invisible hand, which is stretched forth over all the inhabitants of the world. Then naturally arises the ejaculation of the Text, *My times, O God, are in thy hand.* "My fate depends on thee. The duration of my life, and "all the events which in future days are to fill it, are entirely at thy "disposal." -- Let us now, when we have just seen one year close, and another begin, meditate seriously on this sentiment. Let us consider what is implied in *our times being in the hand of God*; and to what improvement this meditation leads.

THE Text evidently implies, first, that *our times* are not in our own hand; that, as our continuance in life depends not on ourselves, so the events which are to happen while life remains, are unknown to us, and not under our own direction. Of this we may behold many a proof, when we look back on the transactions of the year which is just finished. Recollection will readily present to us a busy period, filled up with a mixture of business and amusement, of anxieties and cares, of joys and sorrows. We have talked, perhaps, and acted much. We have formed many a plan; in public or in private life, we have been engaged in a variety of pursuits. Let me now ask, how small a proportion of all that has happened could have been foreseen, or foretold by us? How many things have occurred, of which we had no expectation; some, perhaps, that have succeeded beyond our hopes; many, also, that have befallen us contrary to our

wish? How often were each of us admonished that there are secret wheels, which, unseen by us, bring about the revolutions of human affairs; and that, while man was devising his way, Providence was directing the event?

That scene is now closed. The tale of that year has been told. We look forward to the year which is beginning; and what do we behold there?—All, my brethren, is a blank to our view: A dark unknown presents itself. We are entering on an untried, undiscovered country, where, as each succeeding month comes forward, new scenes may open; new objects may engage our attention; changes at home or abroad, in public or in private affairs, may alter the whole state of our fortune. New connexions may be at hand to be formed, or old ones just about to be dissolved; perhaps, we may have little more to do with this world, or with any of its connexions; we may be standing on the verge of time and life, and on the point of passing into a new region of existence. In short, the prospect before us is full of awful uncertainty. Life and death, prosperity and adversity, health and sickness, joy and trouble, lie in one undistinguishable mass, where our eye can descry nothing through the obscurity that wraps them up.

While it is thus certain that *our times* are not at our own disposal, we are taught by the Text, that they are *in the hand of God*. This may be considered in two views. Our times are in the hand of God, as a supreme Disposer of events. They are in the hand of God, as a Guardian and a Father.

Our times, I say, *are in the hand of God* as a supreme irresistible Ruler. All that is to happen to us in this and the succeeding years of our life,—if any succeeding years we shall be allowed to see,—has been foreknown and arranged by God. The first view under which human affairs present themselves to us, is that of confused and irregular succession. The events of the world seem thrown together by chance, like the billows of the sea, tumbling and tossing over each other, without rule or order. All that is apparent to us, is the fluctuation of human caprice, and the operation of human passions. We see the strife of ambition, and the efforts of stratagem, labouring to accomplish their several purposes among the societies of men. But it is no more than the surface, the outside of things that we behold. Higher counsels, than it is in our power to trace, are concerned in the transactions of the world. If we believe in God at all, as the Governour of the universe, we must believe that, without his providence, nothing happens on earth. He over-rules, at his pleasure, the passions of men. He bends all their designs into subserviency to his decree. *He makes the wrath of man to praise him; and restrains*, in what measure he thinks fit, *the remainder of wrath*.* He brings forth in their course all the generations of men. When the time is come for their entering into light, they appear on the stage; and when the time fixed for their dismissal arrives, he *changes their countenance*, and sends them away. The time of our appearing* is now come, after our ancestors had left their place, and gone down to

* Psalm lxxvi. 10.

the dust. We are at present permitted to act our part freely and without constraint. No violence is done to our inclination or choice. But assuredly there is not a day of our life, nor an event in that day, but was foreseen by God. That succession of occurrences, which to us is full of obscurity and darkness, is all light and order in his view. He sees from the beginning to the end; and brings forward every thing that happens, in its due time and place.

Our times are altogether in his hand. Let us take notice, that they are not in the hands either of our enemies, or of our friends. It is not in the power of man to shorten or to prolong our life, more or less than God has decreed. Enemies may employ craft or violence in their attacks; friends may employ skill and vigilance for the preservation of our health and safety; but both the one and the other can have effect only as far as God permits. They work in suberviency to his purpose. By him they are held in invisible bonds. To the exertions of all human agents he says, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther.*

We are to observe next, that *our times are in the hand of God*, not only as an almighty Disposer, but as a merciful Guardian and Father. We are by no means to imagine, that from race to race, and from year to year, God sports with the lives of succeeding generations of men, or, in the mere wantonness of arbitrary power, brings them forth, and sends them away. No; if we have any confidence in what either the light of Nature suggests to all men, or what the revelation of the Gospel has confirmed to Christians, we have full ground to believe that the administration of human affairs is conducted with infinite wisdom and goodness. The counsels of the Almighty are indeed too deep for our limited understandings to trace. *His path* may often, as to us, be *in the sea, and his footsteps in the mighty waters*; while, nevertheless, *all his paths are mercy and truth*. He who, from the benignity of his nature, erected this world for the abode of men; He who furnished it so richly for our accommodation, and stored it with so much beauty for our entertainment; He who, since first we entered into life, hath followed us with such a variety of mercies, surely can have no pleasure in our disappointment and distress. *He knows our frame; He remembers we are dust*; and looks to frail man, we are assured, with *such pity as a father beareth to his children*.* To him we may safely commit ourselves, and all our concerns, as to one who is best qualified, both to direct the incidents proper to happen to us in this world, and to judge of the time when it is fit for us to be removed from it.

Even that ignorance of our future destiny in life, of which we sometimes complain, is a signal proof of his goodness. He hides from us the view of futurity, because the view would be dangerous and overpowering. It would either dispirit us with visions of terrour, or intoxicate us by the disclosure of success. The veil which covers from our sight the events of this and of succeeding years, is a veil woven by the hand of mercy. *Our times are in his hand*; and we have reason to be glad that in his hand they are kept, shut out from

* Psalm ciii. 13, 14.

our view. Submit to his pleasure as an almighty Ruler we must, because we cannot resist him. Equal reason there is for trusting in him as a Guardian, under whose disposal we are safe.

SUCH is the import of the Text, that *our times are in the hand of God*. Our times are unknown to us, and not under our own direction. They are in the hands of God as a Governour and Ruler; in the hands of God as a Guardian and Father. These separate views of the Text require, on our part, separate improvements.

SEEING our times are not in our own hand, seeing futurity is unknown to us, let us, first, check the vain curiosity of penetrating into what is to come. Conjecture about futurity we often must; but upon all conjectures of what this year is to produce, let us lay a proper restraint. Let us wait till God shall bring forward events in their proper course, without wishing to discover what he has concealed; lest, if the discovery were granted, we should see many things which we would wish not to have seen.

The most common propensity of mankind is to store futurity with whatever is agreeable to them; especially in those periods of life when imagination is lively, and hope is ardent. Looking forward to the year now beginning, they are ready to promise themselves much from the foundations of prosperity which they have laid; from the friendships and connexions which they have secured; from the plans of conduct which they have formed. Alas! how deceitful do all these dreams of happiness often prove! While many are saying in secret to their hearts, *To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundantly*, we are obliged in return to say to them, *Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth*. I do not mean that, in the unknown prospect which lies before us, we should forebode to ourselves nothing but misfortunes.—May it be the pleasure of Heaven, that this year run on in a placid and tranquil tenour to us all!—But this I say, that in such foresight of futurity as we are allowed to take, we may reckon upon it as certain, that this year shall prove to us, as many past have proved, a checkered scene of some comforts and some troubles. In what proportion one or other of these shall prevail in it; whether, when it ends, it shall leave with us the memory of joys or of sorrows, is to be determined by Him in whose hands *our times are*. Our wisdom is, to be prepared for whatever the year is to bring; prepared to receive comforts with thankfulness, troubles with fortitude; and to improve both for the great purposes of virtue and eternal life.

ANOTHER important instruction which naturally arises from our times; not being in our own hands is, that we ought no longer to trifle with what it is not in our power to prolong: but that we should make haste to live as wise men; not delaying till to-morrow what may be done to-day; *doing now with all our might whatever our hand findeth to do*, before that *night cometh wherein no man can work*.

Amidst the uncertainty of the events which are before us, there is one thing we have too much reason to believe; namely, that of us who are now assembled in this congregation, and who have seen the year begin, there are some who shall not survive to see it close.

Whether it shall be you, or you, or I, who shall be gathered to our fathers before the revolving year has finished its round, God alone knows. *Our times are in his hand!* — But to our place, it is more than probable that some of us shall have gone. Could we foretell the month, or the day, on which our change was to happen, how diligent would we be in setting our house in order, and preparing ourselves to appear before our Maker? Surely, that ought to be prepared for with most care, concerning which we are ignorant how soon it is to take place. Let us therefore *walk circumspectly*, and *redeem the time*. Let us dismiss those trivial and superfluous cares which burden or corrupt our life, in order to attend to what is of highest importance to us as men and Christians. The beginning of each year should carry to us all a solemn admonition of our folly, in neglecting to improve suitably the years that are past. It should call up mis-spent time into our view; and be like the hand coming forth upon the wall, in the days of Belshazzar, and writing in legible characters over against us, “O man! thy days are numbered; thou art weighed in the balance, and found wanting; take care lest thy kingdom be on the point of departing from thee.”

WHEN we consider, in the next place, that our times, as I before illustrated, are in the hand of God as a sovereign Disposer, it is an obvious inference from this truth, that we should prepare ourselves to submit patiently to his pleasure, both as to the events which are to fill up our days, and as to the time of our continuing in this world. To contend with Him, we know to be fruitless. The word that is gone out of his mouth must stand. In the path which he has marked out for us, whether it be short or long, rugged or smooth, we must walk. Is it not then the dictate of wisdom, that we should previously reconcile ourselves to this sovereign ordination, and bring our minds to harmonize with what is appointed to be our destiny? Let us fortify this temper, by recalling that reflection of the wise man; *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life; all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow?**

To enjoy long life, and see many days, is the universal wish; and, as the wish is prompted by nature, it cannot be in itself unlawful. At the same time, several circumstances concur to temper the eagerness of this wish; and to show us that it should always be formed under due submission to the wiser judgment of Heaven. Who among us can tell, whether, in wishing for the continuance of many years on earth, we may not be only wishing for a prolongation of distress and misery? — You might live, my friends, till you had undergone lingering rounds of severe pain, from which death would have proved a seasonable deliverance. You might live till your breasts were pierced with many a wound from public calamities or private sorrows. You might live till you beheld the death of all whom you had loved; till you survived all those who love you; till you were left as desolate strangers on earth, in the midst of a new race, who neither knew you, nor cared for you; but who wished you off the stage. — Of a nature so ambiguous are all the prospects which life sets before us, that in

* Eccles. vi. 12.

every wish we form relating to them, much reason we have to be satisfied that our times are in the hands of God, rather than our own.

THIS consideration is greatly strengthened, when, in the last place, we think of God acting, not as a Sovereign only, but as a Guardian, in the disposal of our times. This is our great consolation in looking forward to futurity. To God as a wise Ruler, calm submission is due; but it is more than submission that belongs to him as a merciful Father; it is the spirit of cordial and affectionate consent to his will. Unknown to us as the times to come are, it should be sufficient to our full repose that they are known to God. The day and the hour, which are fixed in his counsels for our dismissal from life, we ought to be persuaded are fixed for the best; and that any longer we should not wish to remain.

When we see that last hour drawing nigh, though our spirits may be composed on our own account, yet, on account of our friends and families, no little anxiety and sorrow may be sometimes apt to take possession of the mind. Long we have enjoyed the comfort of their society, and been accustomed to consider them as parts of ourselves. To be parted from them for ever is, at any rate, a bitter thought; but to the bitterness of this, is over and above added the apprehension of their suffering much by our death. We leave many a relation, perhaps may leave young children, and a helpless family, behind us, to be exposed to various dangers, and thrown forth on an unfriendly world. Such virtuous anxieties often oppress the tender and feeling heart at the closing periods of life.—My brethren, look up to that God, in whose hand *the times* of your fathers were; in whose hand *the times* of your posterity shall be. Recollect, for your comfort, the experience of ages. When were the righteous utterly forsaken by God in times past? Why should they be forsaken by him in times to come? Well did he govern the world before you had a being in it: Well shall he continue to govern it after you are no more. No cause have you, therefore, to oppress your minds with the load of unknown futurity. Commit your cares to a Father in heaven. Surrender your life, your friends, and your family, to that God who hath said, *The children of his servants shall continue, and their seed shall be established before him.**—*Leave thy fatherless children, I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*†

I HAVE thus shown what the import is, and what the improvement should be, of the doctrine of the Text, that *our times are in the hand of God*. It asserts a fact, the truth of which can be called in question by none; a fact which, whether persons have any sentiments of religion or not, is calculated to make a serious impression on every mind; especially at seasons when the revolution of years gives us warning that our duration on earth is measured, and advances towards its period. To persons who are religiously disposed, who study to improve life to its proper purposes, to do their duty towards God and man, and through the merits of their Redeemer to obtain grace and favour from Heaven, the doctrine of the Text is still more

* Psalm cii. 28.

† Jer. xlix. 11.

important. Among them it tends to awaken impressions which are not only serious, but, as I have shown, salutary and comforting to the heart. — Thankful that our times are in the hand of a Sovereign, who is both wise and gracious, let us prepare ourselves to meet the approaching events of life with becoming resignation, and at the same time with manly constancy and firm trust in God. As long as it shall please him to continue our abode in the world, let us remain faithful to our duty; and when it shall please him to give the command for our removal hence, let us utter only this voice: “In thy hand, O my God, *my times are*. Thou art calling me away. Here I am, ready to obey thy call, and at thy signal to go forth. I thank thee that I have been admitted to partake so long of the comforts of life, and to be a spectator of the wisdom and goodness displayed in thy works. I thank thee that thou hast borne so long with my infirmities and provocations; hast allowed me to look up to thy promises in the Gospel, and to hear the words of eternal life uttered by my great Redeemer. With gratitude, faith, and hope, I commit my soul to thee. *Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace; for mine eyes have seen thy salvation.*” — Such are the sentiments with which every pious and good man should conclude his life. Such indeed are the sentiments which he ought to carry through every part of life. With these may we begin, and with these conclude, every succeeding year, which God shall think fit to add to our earthly existence!

SERMON LIV.

ON THE MIXTURE OF BAD MEN WITH THE GOOD IN HUMAN SOCIETY.

MAT. xiii. 30.

Let both grow together until the harvest. —

THE parable, of which these words are a part, contains a prophetic description of the state of the church. Our Lord predicts, that the societies of Christians were to be infected with persons of loose principles and bad dispositions, whom he likens to *tares* springing up among *wheat*. He intimates that there should arise some whose officious zeal would prompt the desire of exterminating immediately all such evil men; but that this were contrary to the designs of Providence, and to the spirit of Christianity; that a complete separation was to be made at last between the good and the bad; but that separation was to be delayed till the end of the world, when, in the style of the parable, the *tares* should be entirely gathered out from among the *wheat*. *Let both grow together until the harvest.*

When we look around us, nothing is more conspicuous in the state of the world, than that broad mixture of the religious and the unreligious, the virtuous and the wicked, which we find taking place in

every society. Strong objections seem hence to arise against either the wisdom or goodness of divine Providence; especially when we behold bad men not only tolerated in the world, but occasionally exalted in their circumstances, to the depression of the just. Why, it will be said, if a Supreme Being exist, and if his justice rule the universe, does he allow such infamous persons as the records of history often present, to have a place, and even to make a figure in his world? Why sleeps the thunder idle in his hand, when it could so easily blast them? What shall we think of one who, having the power of exterminating them always at his command, permits them to proceed without disturbance; nay, sometimes appears to look on them with complacency?—It becomes highly worthy of our attention to consider what answer can be made to these objections; to inquire whether any reasons can be given that serve to justify this dispensation of Providence, in allowing a mixture of bad men to continue on the face of the earth until the end of time. This inquiry shall make the subject of the present Discourse, together with such reflections as naturally arise from surveying the state of human affairs.

BUT, before entering directly on such inquiry, it may be proper to take notice, that, in our estimation of who are the good, who are the bad, we are often in hazard of committing mistakes. The real characters of men are known only to God. They frequently depend on the secret and unseen parts of life. As in judging of themselves men are always partial, so in judging of others they often err, through the imperfect information which they have gathered, or the rash prejudices which they have formed. They are too apt to limit the character of virtue to those who agree with them in sentiment and belief; and to exaggerate the failings of those against whom they have conceived dislike, into great and unpardonable crimes. Were it left to the indiscreet zeal of some to extirpate from the earth all those whom they consider as bad men, there is ground to apprehend that, instead of tares, the wheat would often be rooted out. — At the same time we readily admit the fact, as too manifest to be denied, that a multitude of gross and notorious sinners are now mixed with the followers of God and virtue. Let us proceed then to consider how far this is consistent with the justice and wisdom of the Governour of the world.

It is a principle in which all serious and reflecting persons have agreed, and which by many arguments is confirmed, that our present state on earth is designed to be a state of discipline and improvement, in order to fit human nature for a higher and better state which it is to attain hereafter. Now, this principle being once admitted, we say, that the mixture of virtue and vice which here prevails, is calculated to answer this purpose better than a more uniform and perfect state of society would have done.

FOR, in the first place, The crimes of the wicked give occasion to the exercise of many excellent dispositions of heart among the righteous. They bring forth all the suffering virtues, which otherwise would have had no field; and by the exercise of which the

human character is tried, and acquires some of its chief honours. Were there no bad men in the world, to vex and distress the good, the good might appear in the light of harmless innocence; but could have no opportunity of displaying fidelity, magnanimity, patience, and fortitude. One half of virtue, and not the least important half, would be lost to the world. In our present imperfect state, any virtue which is never exercised is in hazard of becoming extinct in the human breast. If goodness constantly proceeded in a smooth and flowery path; if, meeting with no adversary to oppose it, it were surrounded on every hand with acclamation and praise, is there no ground to dread that it might be corrupted by vanity, or might sink into indolence? This dangerous calm must therefore be interrupted. The waters must be troubled, lest they should stagnate and putrefy. When you behold wicked men multiplying in number, and increasing in power, imagine not that Providence particularly favours them. No; they are suffered for a time to prosper, that they may fulfil the high designs of Heaven. They are employed as instruments in the hand of God for the improvement of his servants. They are the rods with which he chastens the virtuous, in order to rouse them from a dangerous slumber; to form them for the day of adversity, and to teach them how to suffer honourably.

In the next place, The mixture of the bad among the good serves not only to give exercise to the passive graces, but also to improve the active powers and virtues of man. It inures the righteous to vigilance and exertion. It obliges them to stand forth, and act their part with firmness and constancy in evil times. It gives occasion for their virtues to shine with conspicuous lustre; and makes them appear as *the lights of the world* amidst surrounding darkness. Were it not for the dangers that arise from abounding iniquity, there would be no opportunity for courage to act, for wisdom to admonish, for caution to watch, nor for faith to exert itself in *overcoming the world*. It is that mixture of dispositions which now takes place, that renders the theatre on which we act so busy and stirring, and so much fitted for giving employment to every part of man's intelligent and moral nature. It affords a complete field for the genuine display of characters; and gives every man the opportunity to come forth and show what he is. Were the tenour of human conduct altogether regular and uniform, interrupted by no follies and vices, no cross dispositions and irregular passions, many of our active powers would find no exercise. Perhaps even our life would languish, and become too still and insipid. Man is not yet ripe for a paradise of innocence, for the enjoyment of a perfect and faultless society. As in the natural world, he is not made for perpetual spring and cloudless sky, but by the wintry storm must be called to exert his abilities for a warming shelter and defence; so in the moral world, the intermixture of bad men renders many an exertion necessary, which in a more perfect state of the world would find no place, but which in the present state of trial is proper and useful. — The existence of vice in the world assuredly testifies our present corruption; and, according to the degree of its prevalence, is always, more or less,

the source of misery. It is a standing proof of the fall and degeneracy of man. But as long as that fallen state continues, the wisdom of Providence eminently appears in making the errors and frailties of the wicked subservient to the improvement of the just. *Tares* are for that reason suffered at present to grow up *among the wheat*.

THESE observations on the wisdom of Providence in this dispensation will be farther illustrated, by considering the useful instructions which we receive, or which at least every wise man may receive, from the follies and vices of those among whom we are obliged to live.

First, They furnish instruction concerning the snares and dangers against which we ought to be most on our guard. They put it thereby in our power to profit by the errors and misconduct of others. By observing from what small beginnings the greatest crimes have arisen; observing how bad company has seduced this man from his original principles and habits; how a careless indulgence of pleasure has blinded and intoxicated that man; how the neglect of divine institutions has, in another, gradually paved the way for open profligacy; much salutary instruction is conveyed to the virtuous. Tracing the dangerous and slippery paths by which so many have been insensibly betrayed into ruin, their views of human nature are enlarged; the sense of their own imbecility is strongly impressed upon them; accompanied with the conviction of the necessity of a constant dependence on the grace and assistance of Heaven. All the crimes, which they behold disturbing society around them, serve as signals hung out to them, beacons planted in their view, to prevent their making shipwreck among those rocks on which others have split. It has been justly said, that not only from the advices of his friends, but from the reproaches of his enemies, a wise man may draw instruction. In the same manner, it is not only by the examples of good men, but likewise by those of the wicked, that an attentive mind may be confirmed in virtue.

Next, THESE examples of bad men, while they admonish the virtuous of the dangers against which they are to guard, are farther profitable by the views which they exhibit of the evil and the deformity of sin. Its odious nature never appears in so strong a light as when displayed in the crimes of the wicked. It is true that, when vice is carried only to a certain degree, and disguised by plausible colours, it may pass unproved, and even for a while seem popular in the world. But it is no less true that, when it becomes open and flagrant, and is deprived of the shadow of virtue, it never fails to incur general reproach, and to become the object either of contempt or of hatred. How often, for instance, have the greatest abilities, which once drew esteem and admiration, sunk, in a short time, into the most humiliating degradation, merely through the ascendant which corrupted inclinations and low habits had acquired over their possessor? How often have the rising honours of the young been blasted, by their forsaking the path of honour on which they had once entered, for the blind and crooked tracks of depravity and folly? Such spectacles of the infamy of vice, such memorials of the dis-

grace attending it, are permitted by Providence for general instruction; and assuredly are edifying to the world. It was necessary for moral improvement, that the beauty and excellence of virtue, and the deformity of vice, should be strongly impressed on every intelligent mind. This could never be done with so great advantage as by the striking contrasts of both, which are produced by the living examples of evil men intermixed with the good. It is in this mirror that we clearly contemplate how much the *righteous is more excellent than his neighbour*.

THE same purpose of important instruction is farther promoted by the instances of misery which the state of wicked men on earth affords. I admit that the worldly success which sometimes attends them may blind and seduce the unwary; but a little more reflection enables men to distinguish between apparent success and real happiness. The condition of worthless men, whatever splendour riches may throw around them, is easily discerned to be a restless and miserable one; and the misery which they suffer, to be derived from their vices. In that great corrupted crowd which surrounds us, what incessant bustle and stir, what agitation and tumult take place? What envy and jealousy of one another? How much bitterness of resentment do we behold among them; mutually deceiving and deceived; supplanting and supplanted; ever pursuing, but never satisfied? These are not matters of rare observation, or which require nice scrutiny to discover them. We need only open our eyes to behold the wicked tormented by their passions, and far removed from that sanctuary of calmness and tranquillity which is the abode of real happiness. Nay, when we appeal to bad men themselves, after they have run the whole round of vicious pleasures, we will often find them obliged to confess, that the wretched result of their pursuits has been *vanity and vexation of spirit*; and that the happiest days they have enjoyed were in the times of innocence, before criminal desires and guilty passions had taken possession of their breasts. Such practical demonstrations as these, of the infelicity of sin, are yielded by the examples of evil-doers whom we see around us. By attending to their situation, the misery, as well as infamy, of guilt is realised, and rendered sensible to our apprehension.

THUS, upon a fair inquiry, you behold how the ways of God may, in this remarkable case, be justified to man. You behold what important ends are advanced, by permitting *the tares* at present to *grow together with the wheat*. The intermixture of evil men in human society serves to exercise the suffering graces and virtues of the good; by the diversity of characters among those with whom they have intercourse, it serves to bring forth and improve their active powers and virtues, and to enlarge the circle of useful occupations; it serves to instruct them in the temptations against which they are to guard, to reveal to them all the deformity of vice, and to make its miseries pass conspicuously before their eyes. When we consider them as actors on the theatre of the world, they are thereby improved in the part they have to perform. When we consider them as spectators of what is passing on that theatre, their minds are thereby instructed;

their views rectified and enlarged by the objects that are set before them.

From these important truths, several reflections no less important arise.

We are naturally taught, in the first place, Never to be hasty in finding fault with any of the arrangements of Providence. The present permission of moral evil on the earth seemed, on the first view, to furnish a strong objection against either the wisdom or the goodness of the Author of nature. After beholding the useful purposes which are answered by that permission, how cautious should we be in advancing any of our rash speculations against his government and conduct! To our confined and humble station it belongs not to censure, but to submit, trust, and adore; satisfied that the farther we inquire, the rectitude of his ways will appear the more; thankful for the discoveries of them which have been imparted to us; and persuaded that, where our discoveries fail, it is not because there is no more wisdom or goodness to be seen, but because our present condition allows us not to see more.

In the second place, Let us be taught with what eye we are to look upon those bad men whom we find around us in the world. Not surely with an eye of envy. Whatever prosperity they may seem to enjoy, they are still no more than *tares*, the weeds of the field, contemptible in the sight of God, tolerated by his providence for a while on account of the righteous, to whose improvement they are rendered subservient. The parable informs us that, in the end, they are to be *gathered together and burnt*. In this life only they have *their good things*. But their prosperity is transitory. *They are brought into desolation in a moment, and utterly consumed with terrors. As a dream when one awaketh, so, O God, when thou awakest, thou shalt despise their image.** — When we consider their unhappy state, it becomes us to behold them with the eye of pity. Let us remember that, in the midst of their errors, they are by nature still our brethren. Let us not behave to them in the spirit of bitterness. Insult not their follies. Pride not yourselves on superiour virtue. Remember that, as bad men are mixed with the good, so, in the best men, vices are at present mixed with virtues. Your own character, good as you may esteem it, is not free from every evil taint; and in the characters of those whom you reprobate as vicious, there are always some good qualities mixed with the bad ones. Study, as far as you can, to reclaim and amend them; and if, in any degree, you have been profited by their failings, endeavour, in return, to profit them by good counsel and advice; by advice not administered with officious zeal, or self-conceited superiority, but with the tenderness of compassion and real friendship.

In the third place, In whatever proportion the admixture of vice may seem to take place in the world, let us never despair of the prevalence of virtue on the whole. Let us not exaggerate, beyond measure, the quantity of vice that is found in the mixture. It is proper to observe, that in the parable now before us, after the owner of

* Psalm lxxiii. 19, 20.

the field had *sown his good seed*; no reason is given us to think, that the good seed was entirely choked up by *tares*. On the contrary, we are told that *the blade sprung up, and brought forth fruit*; and, though the *tares* also arose, yet, in the end, there was a *harvest*, when the *wheat was reaped and gathered into the barn*. In the most corrupted times, God never leaves himself without many witnesses on earth. He is always attentive to the cause of goodness; and frequently supports and advances it by means which we are unable to trace. He nourishes much piety and virtue in hearts that are unknown to us; and beholds repentance ready to spring up among many whom we consider as reprobates. — I know that it has always been common for persons to represent the age in which they live as the worst that ever appeared; and religion and virtue as just on the point of vanishing from among men. This is the language sometimes of the serious; often of the hypocritical, or of the narrow-minded. But true religion gives no sanction to such severe censures, or such gloomy views. Though the *tares* must be at all times springing up, there is no reason for believing that they shall ever overspread the whole field. The nature of the weeds that spring up may vary, according to the nature of the soil. Different modes of iniquity may distinguish different ages of the world; while the sum of corruption is nearly the same. Let not our judgments of men, and of the times in which we live, be hasty and presumptuous. Let us trust in the grace of God; and hope the best of mankind.

In the fourth and last place, Let us keep our eyes ever fixed on that important period, which is alluded to in the Text, as the conclusion of all. *Let both grow together until the harvest*. The great spiritual year is to be closed by a *harvest*, when the *householder is to gather the wheat into his barn*; when, at the end of the world, the final distinction of men and characters is to take place. The confused mixture of good and evil, which now prevails, is only a temporary dispensation of Providence, accommodated to man's fallen and imperfect state. Let it not tempt us for a moment to distrust the reality of the divine government; or to entertain the remotest suspicion that moral good and evil are to be on the same terms for ever. The frailties of our nature fitted us for no more at present than the enjoyment of a very mixed and imperfect society. But when our nature, purified and refined, shall become ripe for higher advancement, then shall the spirits of the just, disengaged from any polluted mixture, undisturbed by sin or by sinners, be united in one divine assembly, and rejoice for ever in the presence of him who made them. Looking forward to this glorious issue with steadfast faith, let no cross appearances ever discomfit our hopes, or lead us to suspect that we have been serving God in vain. If we continue *faithful to the death*, we may rest assured, that in due time we shall *receive the crown of life*.

SERMON LV.

ON THE RELIEF WHICH THE GOSPEL AFFORDS TO THE DISTRESSED.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

MATT. xi. 28.

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

THE life of man on earth is doomed to be clouded with various evils. Throughout all ranks the afflicted form a considerable portion of the human race; and even they who have a title to be called prosperous, are always, in some periods of their life, obliged to drink from the cup of bitterness. The Christian religion is particularly entitled to our regard, by accommodating itself with great tenderness to this distressed condition of mankind. It is not to be considered as merely an authoritative system of precepts. Important precepts it indeed delivers for the wise and proper regulation of life. But the same voice which enjoins our duty, utters the words of consolation. The Gospel deserves to be held a dispensation of relief to mankind under both the temporal and spiritual distresses of their state.

This amiable and compassionate spirit of our religion conspicuously appears in the character of its great Author. It shone in all his actions while he lived on earth. It breathed in all his discourses; and, in the words of the Text, is expressed with much energy. In the preceding verse, he had given a high account of his own person and dignity. *All things are delivered unto me of my Father; and no man knoweth the Son but the Father; neither knoweth any man the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son will reveal him.* But, lest any of his hearers should be discouraged by this mysterious representation of his greatness, he instantly tempers it with the most gracious benignity; declaring, in the Text, the merciful intention of his mission to the world, *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*

THE first thing which claims our attention in these words is, what we are to understand by *coming unto Christ*. This is a phrase which has often given occasion to controversy. By theological writers it has been involved in much needless mystery, while the meaning is in itself plain and easy. The very metaphor that is here used serves to explain it. In the ancient world, disciples flocked round their different teachers, and attended them wherever they went; in order both to testify their attachment, and to imbibe more fully the doctrine of their masters. *Coming unto Christ*, therefore, is the same with resorting to him as our declared Master; acknowledging ourselves his disciples, believing in his doctrine, and followers of his precepts. As Christ is made known to us under the character both of a Teacher and a Saviour, our *coming to him* imports, not only

submission to his instructions, but confidence also in his power to save. It imports that, forsaking the corruptions of sin and the world, we follow that course of virtue and obedience which he points out to us; relying on his mediation of pardon of our offences, and acceptance with Heaven. This is what is implied in the Scripture term *Faith*; which includes both the assent of the understanding to the truth of the Christian religion, and the concurrence of the will in receiving it.

WHAT next occurs in the Text to attract our notice, is the description of those to whom the invitation is addressed. All those who *labour and are heavy laden*, that is, who, in one way or other, feel themselves grieved and distressed, are here invited to come to Christ. — Now, from two sources chiefly our distresses arise, from moral, or from natural causes.

* *First*, THEY may arise from inward moral causes; from certain feelings and reflections of the mind, which occasion uneasiness and pain. A course of sin and vice always proves ruinous and destructive to the issue. But its tendency to ruin is often not perceived, while that tendency is advancing. For, as sin is the reign of passion and pleasure, it forms men to a thoughtless inconsiderate state. Circumstances, however, may occur, and frequently, in the course of life, do occur, which disclose to a vicious man the ruin which he is bringing on himself, as an offender against the God who made him. When some occasional confinement to solitude, or some turn of adverse fortune, directs his attention immediately upon his own character; or when, drawing towards the close of life, his passions subside, his pleasures withdraw, and a future state comes forward to his view; in such situations it often happens, that the past follies and crimes of such a man appear to him in a light most odious and shocking, and not odious only, but terrifying to his heart. He considers that he is undoubtedly placed under the government of a just God, who did not send him into this world for nought; that he has neglected the part assigned to him; has contemned the laws of Heaven; has degraded his own nature; and instead of being useful, having been hurtful and pernicious to those among whom he lived, is about to leave a detestable memory behind him. — What account shall he give of himself to his Maker? Self-condemned, polluted by so many crimes, how can he expect to find mercy in his sight? — Hence, an overwhelmed and dejected mind; hence, dismal forebodings of punishment; hence, that *wounded spirit*, which, when it is deeply pierced, becomes the sorest of all human evils, and has sometimes rendered existence a burden which could not be endured.

Such distresses as these, arising from moral internal causes, may be made light of by the giddy and the vain; and represented as confined to a few persons only of distempered imagination. But to those professions give them occasion to see men under various circumstances of affliction, they are known to be far from being unfrequent in the world; and, on many more occasions than is commonly gined, to throw over the human mind the blackest gloom of

which it is susceptible. Religious feelings, be assured, have a deep root in the nature of man. They form a part of the human constitution. They are interwoven with many of those fears and hopes which actuate us in the changing situations of fortune. During the gay and active periods of life, they may be smothered; but with most men they are smothered rather than totally obliterated: And if any crisis of our condition shall awaken, and bring them forth, in their full force, upon a conscious guilty heart, woe to the man, who, in some disconsolate season, is doomed to suffer their extreme vengeance!

BUT, while under such distresses of the mind, not a few may be said to *labour and to be heavy laden*, greater still is the multitude of those who, from natural external causes, from the calamities and evils of life, undergo much suffering and misery. The life of man is not indeed wholly composed of misery. It admits of many pleasing scenes. On the whole, there is reason to believe that it affords more joy than grief. At the same time, the unfortunate, as I before observed, form always a numerous class of mankind; and it may be said with truth that *sore travel is ordained for the sons of men*. Though the burden is not equally laid on all; some there always are, on whom it lies with oppressive weight. — Unexpected disappointments have crushed their hopes, and blasted the plans which they had formed for comfort in the world. The world had, perhaps, smiled upon them once, only to give them a sharper feeling of its miseries at the last. Struggling with poverty, unable to support their families whom they see languishing around them, they, at the same time, are obliged, by their situation in society, to conceal their necessities; and, under the forced appearance of cheerfulness, to hide from the world a broken heart. They are stung, perhaps, by the unkindness of friends; cast off by those in whom they had trusted; or torn by untimely death from real friends, in connexion with whom they might have flourished and been happy; at the same time borne down, it may be, with the infirmities of a sickly body, and left to drag a painful life without assistance or relief. — How many sad scenes of this nature, on which it were painful to insist, does the world afford?

When we turn to those who are accounted prosperous men, we shall always find many sorrows mingled with their pleasures; many hours of care and vexation, wherein they acknowledge themselves classed with those who *labour and are heavy laden*. In entering into some gay festive assembly, we behold affected cheerfulness displayed on every countenance; and might fancy that we had arrived at the temple of unmixed pleasure and gladness of heart. Yet, even there, could we look into the bosoms of these apparently happy persons, how often would we find them inwardly preyed upon by some tormenting suspicions, some anxious fears, some secret griefs, which either they dare not disclose to the world, or from which, if disclosed, they can look for no relief? — In short, amidst that great company of pilgrims who are journeying through life, many there are whose journey is through a valley of tears; and many to whom that valley is cheered by the transient glimpses of joy.

To these classes of mankind is addressed the invitation of the Text.

To them it is in a particular manner addressed; overlooking the giddy and dissipated multitude. *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.* Not as if our Saviour were always ready to accept that sort of piety which is merely the consequence of distress; or made all those welcome, who are driven by nothing but fear or danger to have recourse to him. His words are to be understood as intimating, that the heart which is humbled and softened by affliction, is the object of his compassionate regard; that he will not reject us merely because we have been cast off by the world; but that, if with proper dispositions and sentiments we apply to him in the evil day, we shall be sure of meeting with a gracious reception. It now remains to show, what that reception is which we may look for; what that rest is which Christ hath promised to confer on those who *come to him*; whether their distress arise from moral or from natural causes. *Come unto me, and I will give you rest.*

CHRIST affords rest to the disturbed mind that labours under apprehensions and fears of guilt. Let those who suffer distress of this nature *come to Christ*, that is, with contrition and repentance, have recourse to him as their Saviour, and they shall regain quietness and peace. Foolish and guilty they have been, and justly lie under dread of punishment; but the penitent sorrow which they now feel implies their disposition to be changed. It implies, as far as it is genuine, that, sensible of their folly, they now desire to become good and wise; and are determined for the future to hold a virtuous course, could they only hope to obtain pardon for the past. In this situation of mind, let them not be cast down and despair. Christ has brought with him from heaven the olive-branch. He carries in his hand the signal of forgiveness. The declaration which he publishes is, *Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy upon him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.** Insufficient though our own repentance be, to procure pardon from Heaven, we are informed, that an all-sufficient atonement has been made by Christ. Neither the number nor the atrocity of offences excludes, from forgiveness, the penitent who returns to his duty. To all who come under this description, the offer of mercy extends, without exception. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?†*

This discovery of divine government, afforded by the Gospel, is perfectly calculated to scatter the gloom which had overcast the desponding heart. The atmosphere clears up on every side; and is illuminated by cheering rays of celestial mercy. Not only is hope given to the penitent, but it is rendered sinful not to indulge that hope. We are not only allowed and encouraged, but we are commanded to trust in the divine clemency. We are commanded to believe that *none who come unto Christ he will in any wise cast out.†—As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live; turn ye, ye, from*

* Isaiah, lv. 7.

† Rom. viii. 32.

† John, vi. 37.

*your evil ways; for why will ye ~~be~~ O house of Israel? **—Such is the relief which the religion of Christ brings to them who *labour and are heavy laden* under the impressions of guilt and divine displeasure; a relief which nothing can render ineffectual to the heart, except the most gloomy superstition, founded on gross misconceptions of the nature and attributes of God.—Let us now

II. CONSIDER what *rest* the religion of Christ gives to them whose distress arises not from inward and moral, but from natural and external causes; from adverse fortune, or any of those numerous calamities to which we are at present exposed. To such persons, it may seem more difficult to promise any effectual relief. In the former case, the distress lay entirely in the mind. As soon as its views are rectified, and its apprehensions quieted, the evil is removed, and the cure effected. Here, the distress arises from without; and the religion of Christ affects not the course of external events. But though it removes not all the evils of life; though it promises no continuance of undisturbed prosperity (which indeed it were not salutary for man always to enjoy); yet, if it mitigates the evils which necessarily belong to our state, and supports us under them, it may justly be said to give *rest to them who labour and are heavy laden*. When much that is material and important is effected, we have no cause to complain, though all that we desire be not accomplished.—In this part of the Discourse, I am to be considered as addressing myself, not merely to such as are at present suffering any severe calamity; I now speak to many, who, in the midst of health and affluence, enjoy the various comforts of life. But I must desire such persons to look forward to what may one day be their state. Let them reflect how important it is to prepare themselves for the future unknown vicissitudes of the world. For, *if a man live many years, and rejoice in them all; yet let him remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many.*†—Now, either in the prospect of future distress, or under present suffering, I say, that the religion of Christ gives *rest* to the heart, by the fortitude which it inspires, and by the consolations which it affords.

First, It inspires fortitude. It discovers a supreme administration, so friendly to the interests of goodness, as never to allow the followers of Christ to dread, that, in any situation of fortune, they shall be neglected by Heaven. From the abstract consideration of the divine perfections, men had always some ground to believe, that the general order of the universe was consulted by its great Ruler. But how far the interest of individuals might be obliged to yield, or, in many cases, might be sacrificed, to this general order, they were left altogether in the dark. Here the Gospel of Christ comes to our aid, by the explicit assurance which it gives, that, in the great system of Providence, the welfare of every single good man is particularly included. *All things*, we are expressly told, are made to *work together*, not merely for the order and perfection of the whole, but also, *for good to them who love God*.‡ The life of every person who comes under this description, forms a system complete within itself; where

* *Isaiah*, xlii. 11.

† *Ecclesiastes*, xi. 8.

‡ *Romans*, viii. 28.

every event that happens to him, possesses its destined place, and forms a link in that great chain of causes, which was appointed, from the beginning of things, for carrying on his improvement and felicity. Such an arrangement of the affairs of the world, may appear astonishing to our narrow capacities; yet surely implies no effort beyond the reach of infinite power, joined with infinite wisdom and goodness.

Hence arises a degree of fortitude and constancy to good men, which can upon no other grounds be attained. Faith, in these principles of the Gospel, erects for them a fortress, impregnable to the assaults of the world, into which they can at all times retreat. Sitting under the shelter of divine protection, they calmly hear the storm, when it blows with its utmost violence around them. *The floods have lifted up their voice; they have lifted up all their waves. But the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters; yea, than the mighty waves of the Sea.** Of the man who possesses such principles, it is justly said, *His heart is established; he shall not be afraid of evil tidings, his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.†* Tranquillity, order, and magnanimity, dwell with him; while all is confusion and trepidation among those who have nothing to look to but the apparent disorders of the world.

THE doctrine of Christ not only arms us, in this manner, with fortitude against the approach of evil; but, supposing evils to fall upon us with their heaviest pressure, it lightens the load by many consolations, to which others are strangers. While bad men trace, in the calamities with which they are visited, the hand of an offended Sovereign, Christians are taught to view them as the well-intended chastisements of a merciful Father. They hear, amidst them, that still voice which a good conscience brings to their ear: *Fear not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed, for I am thy God.†* They apply to themselves the comfortable promises with which the Gospel abounds. They discover in these the happy issue decreed to their troubles; and wait with patience till Providence shall have accomplished its great and good designs. In the mean time, devotion opens to them its blessed and holy sanctuary: that sanctuary in which the wounded heart is healed, and the weary mind is at rest; where the cares of the world are forgotten, where its tumults are hushed, and its miseries disappear; where greater objects open to our view than what the world presents; where a more serene sky shines, and a sweeter and calmer light beams on the afflicted heart. In those moments of devotion, a pious man, pouring out his wants and sorrows to an almighty Supporter, feels that he is not left solitary and forsaken in a vale of woe. God is with him; Christ and the Holy Ghost are with him; and, though he should be bereaved of every earthly friend, he can look up in heaven to a Friend who will never die.

To these present consolations, the religion of Christ adds the joyful prospect of that future state, where eternal rest remaineth for the people of God. This life they are taught to consider as only the house of their pilgrimage; the temporary mission of painful though necessary discipline. But let them endure for a little, and the pil-

* Psalm cxlii. 3, 4.

† Psalm cxlii. 7, 8.

‡ Isaiah, xli. 10.

grimace shall end, the discipline shall be finished; and all the virtuous be assembled in those blissful regions which are prepared for their reward. Such a prospect cheers the darkest hours of life; and affords a remedy to every trouble. *The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed.** They appear, in this comparative view, as no more than a distressing dream of the night, from which one awakes into health, and light, and joy. Peculiar is this high consolation to the religion of Christ. It is what all nations had eagerly wished for; what all philosophy had anxiously sought to discover; but what no research, no philosophy were able to ascertain to mankind, till Christ brought the assurance of life and immortality from heaven; and conferred on his disciples this noble and inestimable gift.

Thus, on the whole, the Christian doctrine is found to be the great medicine of life. It is the balm of human sorrows and cares. In our present state, where so many are suffering actual distress, of one kind or other, and where all have reason to dread the approach of distress, it is religion only that can alleviate the burdens of life, and smooth our passage through this evil world.—Let this view of religion persuade us to improve the sacred ordinance of our Lord's Supper, for *coming unto Christ* in the way before explained: that is, joining ourselves to him as his disciples; his disciples, not in words and professions only, but in heart and in truth; *taking upon us his yoke*, as is added in the words immediately following the Text; and *learning of him who is meek and lowly in heart*. Let those who labour under the sense of remembered follies and crimes, *come unto Christ* with penitent dispositions, and they shall obtain pardon. Let those who labour under the suffering of present, or the apprehension of future sorrows, *come unto Christ*, and they shall receive consolation. All who are in any sense *heavy laden*, coming unto him, shall find rest to their souls.

BEFORE concluding this Discourse, there is another set of men, not yet mentioned, to whom I must also address the exhortation in the Text; those I mean who, labouring under none of the distressful burdens of life, are surfeited of its pleasures; who labour under the burden only of languid ease, and the load of insipid prosperity. You drag, my friends, but a miserable existence. Oppressed by no sorrow, you feel vacuity and dissatisfaction within; you are often weary of life; and, in your solitary hours, are disposed to confess that all you have experienced is vanity. Wherefore should you any longer *spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labour for that which satisfieth not?* Come to the waters which are now offered to you, and drink. Fear, and your souls shall live. Retreat from the corrupting vanities of the world, to Christ, to religion, and to virtue. New sources of enjoyment shall then be opened to you. A world yet untried shall display itself to your view. You shall be formed to a relish for the quiet and innocent pleasures of piety and devotion; of friendship and good affections; of useful knowledge and virtuous activity; of calm society, and, seasonable retirement; pleasures of

which at present you have no conception of, which, upon trial, you shall find superiour to the trifling or turbulent amusements, in which you have hitherto passed your days. — The true satisfaction of the human mind is only to be found in religion and goodness; in a purified heart and a virtuous life. All other plans of happiness are fallacious, and pregnant with disappointment. It is only by *acquainting ourselves with God*, that we can *find peace*: And those who are *weary and heavy laden* now, shall be *weary and heavy laden* to the end, unless they come to him who only can *give them rest*.

SERMON LVI.

ON LUXURY AND LICENTIOUSNESS.

ISAIAH, v. 12.

The harp, and the viol, the tabret, and pipe, and wine, are in their feasts; but they regard not the work of the Lord, neither consider the operation of his hands.

It appears from many passages in the writings of this Prophet, that in his days great corruption of manners had begun to take place among the people of Israel. Originally a sober and a religious nation, accustomed to a simple and pastoral life, after they had enlarged their territories by conquest, and acquired wealth by commerce, they gradually contracted habits of luxury; and luxury soon introduced its usual train of attending evils. In the history of all nations, the same circulation of manners has been found; and the age in which we live resembles, in this respect, the ages which have gone before it. Forms of iniquity may vary; but the corrupt propensities of men remain at all times much the same; and revolutions from primitive simplicity to the refinements of criminal luxury have been often exhibited on the stage of the world. The reproof directed in the Text to the Jews of that antient age, will be found equally applicable to the manners of many in modern times. In discoursing from it, I shall first consider the character of those who are described in the Text, and show the guilt that is involved in it. I shall next consider the duties which persons of that character are supposed to have neglected; to *regard the work of the Lord*, and to *consider the operation of his hands*.

I. WHEN we take into view the character pointed at in the Text, it is evident that what the Prophet means to reprove is, the spirit of inconsiderate dissipation, of intemperate indulgence, and irreligious luxury. It is not *the feast and the wine, the harp and the viol*, which he means to condemn. Music and wine are, in themselves, things of innocent nature: Nay, when temperately enjoyed, they may be employed for useful purposes; for affording relaxation from the oppressive cares of life, and for promoting friendly intercourse among men. The opulent are not prohibited from enjoying the good things

of this world, which Providence has bestowed upon them. Religion neither abolishes the distinction of rank, (as the vain philosophy of some would teach us to do,) nor interferes with a modest and decent indulgence of pleasure. — It is the criminal abuse of pleasure which is here censured; that thoughtless and intemperate enjoyment of it which wholly absorbs the time and attention of men; which obliterates every serious thought of the proper business of life; and effaces the sense of religion and of God.

It may be proper to remark, that it is not open and direct impiety, which is laid to the charge of the persons here characterised. It is not said, that in their feasts they scoffed at religion, or blasphemed the name of God. To this summit of wickedness these persons had not yet arrived; perhaps the age in which they lived gave not its countenance to this wantonness of impiety. It is merely a negative crime of which they are accused; that they *regarded not the work of the Lord, neither considered the operation of his hands*. But this absence of all religious impressions is here pointed out, as sufficient to stigmatise their characters with guilt. As soon as the sense of a Supreme Being is lost, the great check is taken off, which keeps under restraint the passions of men. Mean desires, and low pleasures, take place of the greater and nobler sentiments which reason and religion inspire. Amidst the tumult of *the wine and the feast*, all proper views of human life are forgotten. The duties which, as men, they have to perform, the part they have to act in the world, and the distresses to which they are exposing themselves, are banished from their thoughts. *To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundantly*, is the only voice. Inflamed by society, and circulated from one loose companion to another, the spirit of riot grows and swells, till it ends in brutal excess.

Were such disorders rare and occasional merely, they might perhaps be forgotten and forgiven. But, nourished by repetition and habit, they grow up among too many, to become the business and occupation of life. By these unfortunate votaries of pleasure, they are accounted essential to happiness. Life appears to stagnate without them. Having no resource within themselves, their spirits sink, and their very being seems annihilated, till the return of their favourite pleasures awoken within them some transient sparkles of joy. — Idleness, ease, and prosperity, have too natural a tendency to generate the follies and vices now described. *Because they have no changes*, said the Psalmist, *therefore they fear not God*.* They are the dark and solitary hours of life, which recal men to recollection and wisdom. They show to the unthinking what this world really is, and what may be expected from it. But the day that is always bright and unclouded, is not made for men. It flatters them with the dangerous illusion, that it is in their power to render life one scene of pleasure; and that they have no other business on earth, but to spread the *feast*, and call *the harp and the viol* to sound. But the examples are so frequent, of the dangers and the crimes which arise from the immoderate abuse of pleasure, that on this part

of the subject it seems needless to insist any longer. I proceed, therefore,

II. To consider the duties which men are accused of having neglected; and which, it is here supposed, if duly attended to, would have acted as the correctives of dissolute and irreligious luxury; these are, *to regard the work of the Lord, and to consider the operation of his hands.*—By recommending such duties, I do not mean to represent it as requisite that the feast should be turned into an act of worship; that the countenances of men should be always grave; or that, in the hours of amusement and of social festivity, no subject may employ their thoughts and their discourse, except God and a future state. All extremes in religion are dangerous; and, by carrying austerity too far, we are in hazard of only promoting hypocrisy. But though some, in the last age, might be prone to this extreme; yet, at the present day, there is not much occasion for warning men against it.—What I now insist upon is, that all our pleasures ought to be tempered with a serious sense of God; that scenes of gaiety and enjoyment should never make us forget that we are subjects of his government, and have a part allotted us to act in this world; that on no occasion they should be prolonged so much, repeated so often, or suffered to transport us so far, as to lead us to break any of the divine laws, or to act inconsistently with the character of men and Christians. A prevailing sense of God on the mind is to be ever held the surest guard of innocence and virtue, amidst the allurements of pleasure. It is the salutary mixture, which must be infused into the cup of joy, in order to render it safe and innoxious.

This sense of God should lead us, in the language of the Prophet, *to regard the work of the Lord, and to consider the operation of his hands*, which expressions may be understood as requiring us to have God upon our thoughts under two views; *to regard his work*, as the Author of nature; and *to consider the operation of his hands*, as the Governour of the world. Let us attend more particularly to each of these views of the Supreme Being.

In the first place, We are to view God as the Author of nature, *or to regard the work of the Lord.* With his works we are in every place surrounded. We can cast our eyes no where, without discerning the hand of Him who formed them, if the grossness of our minds will only allow us to behold Him. Let giddy and thoughtless men turn aside a little from the haunts of riot. Let them stand still and contemplate the wondrous works of God; and make trial of the effect which such contemplation would produce.—It were good for them that, even independently of the Author, they were more acquainted with his works; good for them, that from the societies of loose and dissolute men, they would retreat to the scenes of nature; would oftener dwell among them, and enjoy their beauties. This would form them to the relish of uncorrupted, innocent pleasures; and make them feel the value of calm enjoyments, as superior to the noise and turbulence of licentious gaiety. From the harmony of nature, and of nature's works, they would learn to

hear sweeter sounds than what arise from *the viol, the tabret, and the pipe.*

But to higher and more serious thoughts these works of nature give occasion, when considered in conjunction with the Creator who made them.—Let me call on you, my friends, to catch some interval of reflection, some serious moment, for looking with thoughtful eye on the world around you. Lift your view to that immense arch of heaven, which encompasses you above. Behold the sun in all his splendour, rolling over your head by day; and the moon by night, in mild and serene majesty, surrounded with that host of stars, which present to your imagination an innumerable multitude of worlds. Listen to the awful voice of thunder. Listen to the roar of the tempest, and the ocean. Survey the wonders that fill the earth which you inhabit. Contemplate a steady and powerful Hand, bringing round spring and summer, autumn and winter, in regular course; decorating this earth with innumerable beauties, diversifying it with innumerable inhabitants, pouring forth comforts on all that live; and, at the same time, overawing the nations with the violence of the elements, when it pleases the Creator to let them forth.—After you have viewed yourselves as surrounded with such a scene of wonders; after you have beheld, on every hand, such an astonishing display of majesty, united with wisdom and goodness; are you not seized with solemn and serious awe? Is there not something which whispers you within, that to this great Creator, reverence and homage are due by all the rational beings whom he has made? Admitted to be spectators of his works, placed in the midst of so many great and interesting objects, can you believe that you were brought hither for no purpose, but to immerse yourselves in gross and brutal, or, at best, in trifling pleasures; lost to all sense of the wonders you behold; lost to all reverence of that God who gave you being, and who has erected this amazing fabric of nature, on which you look only with stupid and unmeaning eyes?—No: Let the scenes which you behold prompt correspondent feelings. Let them awaken you from the degrading intoxication of licentiousness, into nobler emotions. Every object which you view in nature, whether great or small, serves to instruct you. The star and the insect, the fiery meteor and the flower of spring, the verdant field and the lofty mountain, all exhibit a Supreme Power, before which you ought to tremble and adore; all preach the doctrine, all inspire the spirit, of devotion and reverence. Regarding, then, *the work of the Lord*, let rising emotions of awe and gratitude call forth from your souls such sentiments as these:—“Lord, wherever I am, and whatever I enjoy, may I never forget thee, as the Author of nature! May I never forget that I am thy creature and thy subject! In this magnificent temple of the universe, where thou hast placed me, may I ever be thy faithful worshipper; and may the reverence and the fear of God be the first sentiments of my heart!”—It is to such consideration of God I would now ~~regal~~ your thoughts, from the *wine and the feast*, as proper to check the spirit of levity and folly; and to inspire manly and becoming sentiments, in the place of criminal dissipation. But,

In the *second* place, There is a consideration of a nature still more serious, to be employed for the same purpose; the consideration of God as not only the Author of nature, but the Governour of his creatures. While we regard the work of the Lord, we are also to consider the never-ceasing operation of his hands. We are to look up to an awful and irresistible Providence, stretching its arm over our heads; directing the fate of men, and dispensing at its pleasure happiness or misery. In the giddy moments of jollity, the wanton and thoughtless are apt to say: "*Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die.*" Nothing is better for man, than to rejoice as much as he can "all the days of his vain life; and to keep himself undisturbed by superstition, terrors. He who sitteth in the heavens bestows no minute attention on the sons of earth. He permits *all things to come alike to all, one event to happen to the righteous and to the wicked.*" — Be assured, my brethren, it is not so. You greatly deceive yourselves, by imagining that your Creator and Governour is indifferent to the part you are now acting; or that the distribution of good and evil, which now takes place, has no relation to your moral conduct. In some instances, that relation may not be apparent; because the moral government of God is not completed in this world. But a multitude of proofs show government to be already begun; and point out to you the train in which you may expect it to proceed.

In the history of all ages and nations, you cannot but have observed a thousand instances, in which the operation of the divine hand has been displayed; overtaking evil-doers sooner or later with punishment, and bringing on their own heads the ruin they had devised for others. You are not to imagine, that this displeasure of Providence is exerted only against the ambitious, the treacherous, and the cruel, who are the authors of extensive misery to the world. Under this idea, perhaps, you may be desirous to shelter yourselves, that your excesses are of a harmless kind; that you seek nothing more than the enjoyment of your own pleasures; that your *feast* and your *wine* interfere not with the order of the world; and that therefore you have done nothing which should awake the sleeping thunder and bring it down from heaven on your heads. Though not stained with the blackest colours of guilt, your conduct may nevertheless be highly offensive to the Ruler of the world. His government is not of that indolent inattentive kind, which allows impunity to every lesser criminal. He beholds with displeasure the behaviour of those who degrade their nature by vicious disorders; and contaminate, by their example, every society with which they are connected. His measures are taken, that, in one way or other, they shall suffer.

Look around the circle of your acquaintance, and observe, whether they are not the sober, the industrious, and the virtuous, who visibly prosper in the world, and rise into reputation and influence; observe, whether the licentious and intemperate are not constantly humbled and checked, by some dark reverse either in their health or their fortune; whether the irreligious and profligate are ever suffered to escape long, without being marked with infamy, and be-

coming objects of contempt. — I ask, to what cause this is to be ascribed, but to that *operation of the hand of God*, which I am now calling you to consider? Does it not obviously carry the marks of a plan, a system of things, contrived and fore-ordained by Providence, for rewarding virtue, and punishing vice in every form of its disorders? — The Governour of the world need not for this purpose step from his throne, or put forth his hand from the clouds. With admirable wisdom he hath so ordered the train of human affairs, that, in their natural course, *men's own wickedness shall reprove them, and their backslidings correct them; that they shall be made to eat the fruit of their doings, and to fall into the pit which themselves had digged.*

These things have been always so apparent to observation, that though a man may have been seduced into irregular and evil courses during his life, yet, at the close of it, it seldom happens but he discerns their pernicious nature, and condemns himself for them. Never, perhaps, was there a father, who, after he had spent his days in idleness, dissipation, and luxury, did not, when dying, admonish the children whom he loved, to hold a more honourable course, to follow the paths of virtue, to fear God, and to fulfil properly the duties of their station. — To yourselves, indeed, I can confidently appeal, whether what I am now saying, be not confirmed by your own testimony. After you have been guilty of some criminal acts, in the course of those riotous pleasures which you indulge, have you not, at certain times, felt the stings of remorse? Were you not obliged to confess to yourselves, that a sad prospect of misery was opening before you, if such excesses were to continue? Did you not hear an inward voice upbraiding you, for having sunk and degraded your character so far below that of many of your equals around you? — My friends, what was this but the voice of God, speaking, as the Governour of his creatures, within your heart; testifying loudly, that your course of life was displeasing to him; and warning you, of punishments that were to follow? If his displeasure against you is already begun to be testified, can you tell where it is to stop, or how long it may continue to pursue you, throughout future stages of your existence? *Who knoweth the power of his wrath?* — To this awful, this warning voice, will you not be persuaded reverently to listen? Impressed by the dread authority which it carries, shall you not fall down on your knees before your Maker, imploring his mercy to pardon your past offences, and his grace to rectify your future way?

SUCH ought to be the effects of the consideration of God as the Governour of the world. It leads to thoughts of a very serious nature. When we *regard the work of the Lord*, and contemplate him as the Author of the universe, such contemplation prompts devotion. But when we *consider the operation of his hands* in Providence, and contemplate him as the Governour of mankind, such contemplation prompts humiliation before him for offences committed. The former addresses itself to the ingenuous sentiments that are left in the heart; and awakens a sense of our unworthiness, in neglecting the Author of nature, amidst our riotous pleasures. The latter ad-

dresses itself to our regard for safety and happiness; and awakens fear and dread, from consciousness of the guilt we have contracted. Hence springs up, in every thoughtful mind, an anxious concern to avert the displeasure, and regain the favour, of that Supreme Being to whom we are all subject. This, among unenlightened nations, gave rise to sacrifices, expiations, and all the rites of humble, though superstitious worship. Among nations, who have been instructed in true religion, sentiments of the same nature pave the way for prayer, repentance, faith, and all those duties, by means of which we may hope, through a divine Mediator and Intercessor, to be reconciled to heaven. Natural and revealed religion here appear in concord. We behold the original dictates of the human heart, laying a foundation for the glad reception of the comfortable tidings of the Gospel.

I HAVE thus endeavoured to show in what manner, by *regarding the work of the Lord, and considering the operation of his hands*, we may prevent the dangers arising from a thoughtless indulgence of pleasure; we may be furnished with an antidote to the poison which is too often mixed in that intoxicating cup. — Human life is full of troubles. We are all tempted to alleviate them as much as we can, by freely enjoying the pleasurable moments which Providence thinks fit to allow us. Enjoy them we may: But, if we would enjoy them safely, and enjoy them long, let us temper them with the fear of God. As soon as this is forgotten and obliterated, the sound of *the harp and the viol* is changed into the signal of death. The serpent comes forth from the roses where it had lain in ambush, and gives the fatal sting. Pleasure in moderation is the cordial, in excess it is the bane, of life.

SERMON LVII.

ON THE PRESENCE OF GOD IN A FUTURE STATE.

PSALM vi. 11.

Thou wilt shew me the path of life: In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.

THE apostle Peter, in a discourse which he held to the Jews, applies this passage, in a mystical and prophetic sense, to the Messiah.* But, in its literal and primitive meaning, it expresses the exalted hopes by which the Psalmist David supported himself amidst the changes and revolutions, of which his life was full. By these hopes, when flying before Saul, when driven from his throne, and persecuted by an unnatural son, he was enabled to preserve his virtue, and to maintain unshaken trust in God. — In that early age of the world, those explicit discoveries of a state of immortality, which we enjoy, had not yet been given to mankind. But, though the *Sun of righteousness* was

* Acts, ii. 25—28.

not arisen, the dawn had appeared of that glorious day which he was to introduce. Even in those ancient times, holy men, as the Apostle writes to the Hebrews, *saw the promises afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them; and, confessing that they were strangers and pilgrims on earth, declared that they sought after a better country; that is, an heavenly.** Indeed, in every age, God permitted such hopes to afford support and consolation to those who served him. The full effect of them we behold in those triumphant expressions of the Text, which are to be the subject of this Discourse. They lead us to consider, first, The hope of the Psalmist in his present state; *Thou wilt shew me the path of life.* And, secondly, The termination of his hope in that future state, where *in the presence of God is fulness of joy, and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*

I. *Thou wilt shew me the path of life.* This plainly imports, that there are different *paths*, or courses of conduct, which may be pursued by men in this world; a path which leads to life or happiness, and a path which issues in death or destruction. These opposite lines of conduct are determined by the choice which men make of virtue or of vice; and hence men are divided into two great classes, according as their inclinations lead them to good or to evil. *The path of life* is often a rough and difficult path, followed only by a few. The opposite one is the broad way, in which the multitude walk; seemingly smooth, and strewed with flowers; but leading in the end to death and misery. *The path of life* conducts us up a steep ascent. The palace of virtue has, in all ages, been represented as placed on the summit of a hill; in the ascent of which labour is requisite, and difficulties are to be surmounted; and where a conductor is needed, to direct our way, and to aid our steps.

Now, the hope which good men entertain is, that this *path of life* shall be shown them by God; that, when their intentions are upright, God will both instruct them concerning the road which leads to true happiness, and will assist them to pursue it successfully. Among nations where any suitable ideas of God or of virtue began to be formed, hopes of this nature also began to be entertained. It was consonant to the nature of man, to think that the Supreme Being was favourable to virtue. Accordingly, in the writings of some of the ancient philosophers, we find various obscure traces of this belief, that there was a benign heavenly Spirit, who illuminated the minds of the virtuous, and assisted their endeavours to obtain wisdom and happiness. They even asserted, that no man became great or good, without some inspiration of Heaven.

But what they indistinctly conceived, and could not with confidence rely upon, the doctrine of Christianity hath clearly explained and fully confirmed; expressly and frequently teaching, that, not only by the external discoveries of revelation, but by the inward operations of his Spirit, he *shows* to the humble and virtuous the *path of life*. While by his word he instructs them in their duty, by the influence of his grace he assists them in the performance of it. In all revelation there is certainly no doctrine more comfortable than

* Heb. xi. 13—16.

this. It is to good men a noble and pleasing thought, that they are pursuing a path which God has discovered and pointed out to them. For they know that every path, in which he is their conductor, must be honourable, must be safe, must bring them in the end to felicity. They follow that *Shepherd of Israel*, who always leads his flock into *green pastures*, and makes them *lie down beside the still waters*. At the same time, they know that, if there be truth in religion at all, on this principle they may securely rest, that the Divine Being will never desert those who are endeavouring to follow out, as they can, the path which he has shown them. He beholds them here in a state of great imbecility; surrounded with much darkness; exposed to numberless dangers, from the temptations that assault them without, and the seduction of misguided and disorderly passions within. In this situation, can they ever suspect that the Father of mercies will leave his servants, alone and unfriended, to struggle up the hill of virtue, without stretching forth a compassionate arm to aid their frailty, and to guide them through the bewildering paths of life? Where were then the *God of love*? Where, those infinite compassions of his nature, in which all his worshippers have been encouraged to trust?—No: He will *send forth his light and his truth to bring them to his holy hill*. For the *righteous Lord loveth righteousness, and his countenance becometh to the upright*. With him there is no oblique purpose, to turn him aside from favouring the cause of goodness. No undertaking to which he has given his countenance shall prove abortive. No promise that he has made shall be allowed to fail. Whom he loveth, *he loveth to the end*. *The secret of the Lord is with them that fear him, and he will shew them his covenant*. *The meek will he guide in judgment, and them will he teach his way*.^{*} *His grace shall be sufficient for them, and his strength be made perfect in their weakness*.[†] *They go from strength to strength; every one of them appeareth before God in Zion*.[‡]—Such are the hopes with which good men in the present life set forth on a course of piety and virtue. *Thou wilt shew me the path of life*. Let us now proceed,

II. To consider the termination of these hopes in a future state: *In thy presence is fulness of joy; at thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore*. All happiness assuredly dwells with God. *The fountain of life* is justly said to be *with him*. That supreme and independent Being must necessarily possess within himself every principle of beatitude; and no cause from without can possibly affect his untroubled felicity. Among created dependent beings, happiness flows in scattered and feeble streams; streams that are often tinged with the blackness of misery. But from before the throne of God issues the river of life, full, unmixed, and pure; and the pleasures, which now in scanty portions we are permitted to taste, are all derived from that source. Whatever gladdens the hearts of men or angels, with any real and satisfactory joy, comes from heaven. It is a portion of the *pure influence flowing from the glory of the Almighty*; a ray issuing from the *brightness of the everlasting life*. It is manifest, therefore,

^{*} Psalm lxxv. 14. 9.

[†] 2 Cor. xii. 9.

[‡] Psalm lxxiv. 7.

that every approach to God must be an approach to felicity. The enjoyment of his immediate presence must be the consummation of felicity; and it is to this presence the Psalmist here expresses his hope, that the *path of life* was to conduct him.

The whole of what is implied in arriving at the presence of the Divinity, we cannot expect to comprehend. Such expressions as these of Scripture, *beholding the face of God; being made glad with the light of his countenance, and satisfied with his likeness; seeing light in his light; seeing no longer darkly as through a glass, but face to face; seeing him as he is;* are expressions altogether mysterious, conveying sublime though obscure ideas of the most perfect happiness and highest exaltation of human nature. This we know, that the absence of God, the distance at which we are now placed from any communication with our Creator, is one great source of our infelicity. Faith exerts its endeavours, but often ineffectually, to raise our souls to him. He is a *God that hideth himself*. His ways seem intricate and perplexed. We frequently cannot reconcile them to the conceptions which we had formed of his nature; and with many a suspicion and doubt they perplex the inquiring mind. His works we survey with astonishment. We wonder and adore. But while we clearly trace the footsteps of their great Author, his presence we can never discern. *We go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but we cannot perceive him; on the left hand, where he worketh, but we cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that we cannot see him.** Hence, amidst the various sorrows and discouragements of the present state, that exclamation of Job's is often drawn forth from the pious heart, *O that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his seat!†*

Surrounded by such distressing obscurity, no hope more transporting can be opened to a good man, than that a period is to come, when he shall be allowed to draw nearer to the Author of his existence, and to enjoy the sense of his presence. In order to convey some faint idea of that future bliss, by such an image as we can now employ, let the image be taken from the most glorious representative of the Supreme Being, with which we are acquainted in this world, **the Sun** in the heavens. As that resplendent luminary cheers and revives the universe, when, after the darkness of a tempestuous night, it comes forth in the morning with its brightest lustre, and inspires every heart with gladness; as ascending gradually through the heavens, it converts that whole vast extent, over which its beams are diffused, into a region of light; and thus changes entirely the state of objects, by arraying all nature in beauty, and transforming it into the image of its own brightness:—Some such change as this, though in a degree infinitely superiour, we may conceive the revelation of the Divine Presence to produce upon the human soul. *I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied when I awake with thy likeness.*—But, without endeavouring farther to unfold mysteries which we cannot explore, there are two sublime and expressive views of the Divine Essence given us in Scripture, on which it may be edifying

* Job, xxiii. 8, 9.

† Job, xxiii. 7.

that our thoughts should rest for a little, in order to aid our conceptions of the blessedness of good men hereafter, in the presence of God. It is said, *God is light; God is love.** Let us consider what *fulness of joy must arise* from such manifestations of the Divine Essence to the blessed.

God is Light. The revelation of his presence infers, of course, a complete diffusion of light and knowledge among all who partake of that presence. This unquestionably forms a primary ingredient of happiness. Ignorance, or the want of light, is the source of all our present misconduct, and all our misfortunes. The heart of man is dark; and in the darkness of his heart is the seat of his corruption. He is unable to discern what is truly good. Perpetually employed in search of happiness, he is perpetually misled by false appearances of it. The errors of his understanding impose upon his passions; and, in consequence of the wrong direction which his passions take, he is betrayed into a thousand disorders. Hence sensuality, covetousness, and all the violent contests with others about trifles, which occasion so much misery, and so many crimes in the world. *He feedeth on ashes, a deceived heart hath turned him aside, that he cannot deliver his soul, nor say, Is there not a lie in my right hand?*† — Once open to him the perfect sources of knowledge and truth; suppose him placed in the presence of that God who is *Light*; suppose him illuminated by light derived immediately from the Supreme Being; presently all his former errors would fly away, as mists are dispelled by the rising sun. His whole nature would be changed and reformed. The prejudices which obscured his understanding would be removed. The seductions of his passions would disappear. Rectitude and virtue, having nothing now to obstruct their entrance, would take entire possession of his heart. Angels are happier than men, because they enjoy more enlarged knowledge and views; because they labour under none of our unhappy deceptions; but see the truth as it is in itself; see it, as it is in God. Sharing the same light which illuminates them, good men in a future state will share in their felicity.

Moreover, the light that flows from the presence of Him who is the original source of light, not only banishes miseries which were the effects of former darkness, but also confers the most exquisite enjoyment. The knowledge afforded us at present serves to supply our most pressing wants; but it does no more. It is always imperfect and unsatisfactory; nay, much painful anxiety it often leaves. Narrow is the sphere within which the mind can see at all; and even there it can see only *darkly as through a glass*. But when it shall be enlarged beyond this dusky territory, let loose from this earthly prison, and in *God's light* permitted to see *light*, the most magnificent and glorious spectacles must open to the view of the purified spirit. What must it be to behold the whole stupendous scene of nature unveiled, and its hidden mysteries disclosed! To trace the wise and just government of the Almighty, through all those intricacies which had so long perplexed us! To behold his hand conducting ten

* 1 John, i. 5. — iv. 8.

† Isaiah, xlv. 20.

thousand worlds, which are now unknown to us; and throughout all the regions of boundless space, to view wisdom and goodness perpetually acting, and diversifying its operations in forms of endless variety! Well may such discoveries inspire that song of the blessed, which the Apostle John heard *as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia! for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty! just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints!** As God is Light, so also it is said in Scripture,

God is Love. His presence must of course diffuse love, among all who are permitted to dwell in it. *He that loveth not, knoweth not God. He that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him.*† Were man a single, solitary being, the full enjoyment of light might suffice for his happiness; as the perfection of knowledge would rectify and improve to the highest all his faculties. But, both here and hereafter, he is connected with other beings. Heaven implies a society; and the felicity of that society is constituted by the perfection of love and goodness, flowing from the presence of the God of love.

Hence follows the entire purification of human nature from all those malevolent passions, which have so long rendered our abode on earth the abode of misery. We greatly deceive ourselves, when we charge our chief distresses merely to the account of our external condition in the world. From the disadvantages attending it, I admit, that we may often have been exposed to suffer. We may have met with disappointments in our pursuits. By the arrows of misfortune, we may have been wounded. Under infirmities of body, we may have languished. But on this we may depend, that the worst evils of our present condition arise from the want of goodness and love; from the disorders of selfish passions; from the irritation which these occasion when working within ourselves, and the distress which they produce when breaking out upon us from others; in a word, from that corrupted state of temper, and that reciprocation of jealousies, suspicions, and injuries, which is ever taking place among the societies of men. Could you banish distrust, craft, and uncharitableness, from the earth, and form all mankind into an assembly of the just and the benevolent; could you inspire every heart with kind affections, and render every one friendly and generous to his neighbour; you would banish at once the most afflictive tribe of human evils. Seldom would the voice of complaint be heard. All nature would assume a different aspect. Cheerfulness would be seen in every countenance. Paradise would return. The wilderness would smile; *the desert rejoice and blossom as the rose.*—Now such are the effects which the presence of the God of love must produce on the inhabitants above; *beholding his glory, they are changed into the same image.* In that temple of eternal love, which his presence has hallowed and consecrated, no sound but the voice of harmony is ever heard; no appearances ever present themselves but those of peace and joy.

* Rev. xix. 6. — xv. 3.

† 1 John, iv. 8. 16.

Thus, considering God under these two illustrious characters which are given of him in Scripture, as *Light*, and as *Love*, it follows that in his presence there must be *fulness of joy*. But I am far from saying that the few imperfect hints I have now given exhaust, or even approach to, the sum of those *pleasures for evermore which are at God's right hand*. Ten thousand pleasures are there, which now we have neither faculties to comprehend, nor powers to enjoy. Behind that mysterious cloud, which covers the habitation of eternity, the view of mortals cannot penetrate. Content with our humble and distant situation, we must as yet remain. Faith can only look to those glories from afar. In patient silence, it must wait, trust, and adore.

Supposing the ideas which I have set before you, in this Discourse, to be no more than the speculations of a contemplative mind, such as were wont of old to be indulged by the philosophers of the Platonic school, still they would deserve attention, on account of their tendency to purify and elevate the mind. But when they are considered in connexion with a revelation, which, upon grounds the most unquestionable, we believe to be divine, they are entitled to command, not attention only, but reverence and faith.—They present to us such high expectations as are sufficient to determine every reasonable man to the choice of virtue; to support him under all its present discouragements, and to comfort him in the hour of death. Justly may they excite in our hearts, that ardent aspiration of the Psalmist: *My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God; Oh! when shall I come, and appear before him!*—But, with this wish in our hearts, never, I beseech you, let us forget what was set forth in the first part of this Discourse; that, in order to arrive at the presence of God, the *path of life* must previously be shown to us by him, and that in this path we must persevere to the end. These two things cannot be disjoined, a virtuous life and a happy eternity. *Who shall ascend unto the hill of the Lord? and who shall stand in his holy place? He only who hath clean hands and a pure heart.* Between a corrupted heart and the God of light and love, there never can be any connexion. But of this we may rest assured, that the path of piety and virtue, pursued with a firm and constant spirit, will, in the end, through the merits of our blessed Redeemer, bring us to that presence, where *is fulness of joy, and where are pleasures for evermore*.

SERMON LVIII.

ON CURIOSITY CONCERNING THE AFFAIRS OF OTHERS.

JOHN, xxi. 21, 22.

Peter seeing him, saith to Jesus, Lord, and what shall this man do? Jesus saith unto him, If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou me.

THESE words occurred in a conference which our Lord held with Simon Peter, after his resurrection from the dead. Conscious of the

disgrace which he had incurred by his late denial of his Master, Peter must at this time have appeared before him with shame. Our Lord, after a tacit rebuke, implied in the question which he repeatedly puts to him, *Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?* restores him, with great benignity, to his office as an Apostle, by giving the commandment to *feed his sheep*; and intimates also, that it should be his lot to suffer death in the cause of his Master. The Apostle John, distinguished here by the denomination of *the disciple whom Jesus loved*, being present at this conversation, Peter, who was always eager and forward, looking to John, puts this question to our Saviour, *Lord, and what shall this man do?* "What shall be his employment? what his rank and station in thy kingdom? what his future fate in life?"—By what principle, Peter was moved to put this unseasonable and improper question to his Master; whether it arose from mere curiosity, or from some emotion of rivalry and jealousy, does not appear; but it is plain that our Lord was dissatisfied with the inquiry which he made; and presently he checks Peter's curiosity, by a severe reply; *What is that to thee?* "What is it to thee what *this man* shall do; what shall be his rank; or what the circumstance of his life or his death? Attend thou to thine own duty. Mind thy proper concerns. Fulfil the part which I have allotted to thee. *Follow thou me.*"—The instruction which arises from this conversation of our Lord's with Peter, is, That all prying inquiries into the state, circumstances, or character of others, are reprehensible and improper; that to every man a particular charge is assigned by his Lord and Master, the fulfilment of which ought to be the primary object of his attention, without officiously thrusting himself into the concerns of others. The illustration of these points shall make the subject of the present Discourse.

THAT idle curiosity, that inquisitive and meddling spirit, which leads men to pry into the affairs of their neighbours, is reprehensible on three accounts. It interrupts the good order, and breaks the peace of society. It brings forward and nourishes several bad passions. It draws men aside from a proper attention to the discharge of their own duty.

It interrupts, I say, the order, and breaks the peace of society. In this world we are linked together by many ties. We are bound by duty, and we are prompted by interest, to give mutual assistance, and to perform friendly offices to each other. But those friendly offices are performed to most advantage, when we avoid to interfere unnecessarily in the concerns of our neighbour. Every man has, his own part to act, has his own interest to consult, has affairs of his own to manage, which his neighbour has no call to scrutinise. Human life then proceeds in its most natural and orderly train, when every one keeps within the bounds of his proper province; when, as long as his pursuits are fair and lawful, he is allowed, without disturbance, to conduct them in his own way. *That ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business**, is the apostolical rule, and indeed the great rule, for preservation of harmony and order. But so it is, that, in every

* 1 Thess. iv. 11.

age, a set of men have existed, who, driven by an unhappy activity of spirit, oftener perhaps than by any settled design of doing ill, or any motives of ambition or interest, love to intermeddle where they have no concern, to inquire into the private affairs of others, and, from the imperfect information which they collect, to form conclusions concerning their circumstances and character. These are they who, in Scripture, are characterised as *tattlers*, and *busy bodies in other men's matters*, and from whom we are called to *turn away*.

Though persons of this description should be prompted by nothing but vain curiosity, they are, nevertheless, dangerous troublers of the world. While they conceive themselves to be inoffensive, they are sowing dissension and feuds. Crossing the lines in which others move, they create confusion, and awaken resentment. For every man conceives himself to be injured, when he finds another intruding into his affairs, and, without any title, taking upon him to examine his conduct. Being improperly and unnecessarily disturbed, he claims the right of disturbing in his turn those who wantonly have troubled him. Hence, many a friendship has been broken; the peace of many a family has been overthrown; and much bitter and lasting discord has been propagated through society.

WHILE this spirit of meddling curiosity injures so considerably the peace and good order of the world, it also nourishes, among individuals who are addicted to it, a multitude of bad passions. Its most frequent source is mere idleness, which, in itself a vice, never fails to engender many vices more. The mind of man cannot be long without some food to nourish the activity of its thoughts. The idle, who have no nourishment of this sort within themselves, feed their thoughts with inquiries into the conduct of their neighbours. The inquisitive and curious are always talkative. What they learn, or fancy themselves to have learned, concerning others, they are generally in haste to divulge. A tale which the malicious have invented, and the credulous have propagated; a rumour which, arising among the multitude, and transmitted by one to another, has, in every step of its progress, gained fresh additions, becomes in the end the foundation of confident assertion, and of rash and severe judgment.

It is often by a spirit of jealousy and rivalry, that the researches of such persons are prompted. They wish to discover something that will bring down their neighbour's character, circumstances, or reputation, to the level of their own; or that will flatter them with an opinion of their own superiority. A secret malignity lies at the bottom of their inquiries. It may be concealed by an affected show of candour and impartiality. It may even be veiled with the appearance of a friendly concern for the interest of others, and with affected apologies for their failings. But the hidden rancour is easily discovered. — While, therefore, persons of this description trouble the peace of society, they at the same time poison their own minds with malignant passions. Their disposition is entirely the reverse of that amiable spirit of charity, on which our religion lays so great a stress. Charity *covereth the multitude of sins*; but this prying and meddling

spirit seeks to discover and divulge them. *Charity thinketh no evil*; but this temper inclines us always to suspect the worst. *Charity rejoiceth not in iniquity*; this temper triumphs in the discovery of errors and failings. Charity, like the sun, brightens every object on which it shines; a censorious disposition casts every character into the darkest shade it will bear.

It is to be farther observed, that all impertinent curiosity about the affairs of others tends greatly to obstruct personal reformation; as it draws men's thoughts aside from what ought to be the chief object of attention, the improvement of their own heart and life. They who are so officiously occupied about their neighbours, have little leisure, and less inclination, to observe their own defects, or to mind their own duty. From their inquisitive researches, they find, or imagine they find, in the behaviour of others, an apology for their own failings: And the favourite result of their inquiries generally is, to rest satisfied with themselves. They are at least as good, they think, as others around them. The condemnation which they pass on the vices of their neighbours, they interpret to be a sentiment of virtue in themselves. They become those hypocrites described by our Lord, who see clearly *the mote that is in their neighbour's eye, while they discern not the beam that is in their own*.

IN opposition to such a character as this, the doctrine plainly inculcated by the Text is, that to every man a particular charge is given by his Lord and Master, a part is assigned him by Providence to act; that to this he ought to bend his chief attention; and, instead of scrutinising the character or state of others, ought to think of himself, and leave them to stand or fall by their own master. *What shall this man do?* said Peter. *What,* replies our Lord, *is that to thee? Follow thou me.*

WHERE persons possess any important station, or distinguished rank, in the world, the application of this doctrine to them is manifest. If they have any candour, they cannot refuse to acknowledge that God and the world have a title to expect from them a diligent attention to their proper part in life; and that to waste their time in idle inquiries about others, with whom they have nothing to do, is reprehensible and sinful. But there are multitudes of mankind, to whom this appears in a very different light. They are humble and private men, who are willing to conceive themselves as of little importance in the world. Having no extensive influence, and no call, as they think, to distinguish themselves by active exertions in any sphere, they imagine that they may innocently lead an idle life, and indulge their curiosity, by canvassing at pleasure the character and the behaviour of those around them. With persons of this description every society too much abounds. — My brethren, no one ought to consider himself as insignificant in the sight of God. In our several stations we are all sent forth to be labourers in God's vineyard. Every man has his work allotted, his talent committed to him; by the due improvement of which he might, in one way or other, serve God, promote virtue, and be useful in the world. *Occupy till I come*, is the charge given to all Christians without exception. To be en-

tirely unemployed and idle, is the prerogative of no one, in any rank of life.

Even that sex, whose task is not to mingle in the labours of public and active business, have their own part assigned them to act. In the quiet of domestic shade, there are a variety of virtues to be exercised, and of important duties to be discharged. Much depends on them for the maintenance of private economy and order, for the education of the young, and for the relief and comfort of those whose functions engage them in the toils of the world. Even where no such female duties occur to be performed, the care of preparing for future usefulness, and of attaining such accomplishments as procure just esteem, is laudable. In such duties and cares, how far better is time employed, than in that search into private concerns, that circulation of rumours, those discussions of the conduct, and descants on the character of others, which engross conversation so much, and which end, for the most part, in severity of censure?

In whatever condition we are placed, to act always in character, should be our constant rule. He who acts in character, is above contempt, though his station be low. He who acts out of character, is despicable, though his station be ever so high. *What is that to thee*, what this man or that man does? Think of what thou oughtest to do thyself; of what is suitable to thy character and place; of what the world has a title to expect from thee. Every excursion of vain curiosity about others, is a subtraction from that time and thought which was due to ourselves and due to God. *Having gifts*, says the Apostle Paul, *differing according to the grace that is given us, whether ministry, let us wait on our ministering; or he that teacheth, on teaching; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation. He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.**

In the great circle of human affairs, there is room for every one to be busy and well-employed in his own province, without encroaching upon that of others. It is the province of superiours to direct; of inferiours, to obey; of the learned, to be instructive; of the ignorant, to be docile; of the old, to be communicative; of the young, to be advisable and diligent. Art thou poor? Show thyself active and industrious, peaceable and contented. Art thou wealthy? Show thyself beneficent and charitable, condescending and humane. If thou livest much in the world, it is thy duty to make the light of a good example shine conspicuously before others. If thou livest private and retired, it is thy business to improve thine own mind, and to add, if thou canst do no more, one faithful subject to the Messiah's kingdom. There is indeed no man so sequestered from active life, but within his own narrow sphere he may find some opportunities of doing good; of cultivating friendship, promoting peace, and discharging many of these lesser offices of humanity and kindness, which are within the reach of every one, and which we all owe to one another. In all the various relations which subsist among us in life, as husband and wife, master and servants, parents and children,

* Rom. xii. 6—8.

relations and friends, rulers and subjects, innumerable duties stand ready to be performed; innumerable calls to virtuous activity present themselves on every hand, sufficient to fill up with advantage and honour the whole time of man.

THERE is, in particular, one great and comprehensive object of attention, which, in the Text, is placed in direct opposition to that idle curiosity reprehended by our Lord; that is, to follow Christ. *Follow thou me.* What this man or that man does; how he employs his time; what use he makes of his talents; how he succeeds in the world; are matters concerning which the information we receive can never be of great importance to us; often, is of no importance at all. But how our Saviour behaved while he was on earth, or how, in our situation, he would have behaved, are matters of the highest moment to every Christian.

The commandment given in the Text, to *follow him*, includes both observance of his words, and imitation of his example. The words of Christ contain, as we all know, the standing rule of our life. His example exhibits the great model on which our conduct ought to be formed; and it is to this that the precept here delivered directly refers. — Examples have great influence on all. But, by all human examples, we are in danger of being occasionally misled. We are ever obliged to be on our guard, lest the admiration of what is estimable, betray us into a resemblance of what is blemished and faulty. For the most perfect human characters, in the midst of their brightness and beauty, are always marked with some of those dark spots which stain the nature of man. But our Lord possessed all the virtues of the greatest and best men, without partaking any of their defects. In him, all was light without a shade, and beauty without a stain. — At the same time, his example is attended with this singular advantage, of being more accommodated than any other to general imitation. It was distinguished by no unnatural austerities, no affected singularities; but exhibits the plain and simple tenor of all those virtues for which we have most frequent occasion in ordinary life. In order to render it of more universal benefit, our Lord fixed his residence in no particular place; he tied himself down to no particular calling, or way of living; but gives us the opportunity of viewing his behaviour, in that variety of lights which equally and indifferently regard all mankind. His life was divided between the retired and the active state. Devotion and business equally shared it. In the discharge of that high office with which he was vested, we behold the perfect model of a public character; and we behold the most beautiful example of private life, when we contemplate him among his disciples, as a father in the midst of his family. — By such means he has exhibited before us specimens of every kind of virtue; and to all ranks and classes of men has afforded a pattern after which they may copy. Hardly is there any emergency which can occur in life, but from some incident in our Saviour's conduct, from some feature displayed in his character, we are enabled to say to ourselves, "Thus Christ would have spoken, thus he would have acted, thus

"he would have suffered, if he had been circumstanced as we are now."

Instead, therefore, of thinking of thy neighbours around thee, and of inquiring how they behave, keep Christ in thine eye, and in thy whole conduct follow him. *Follow him* in his steady and conscientious discharge of duty, amidst opposition from evil men and a corrupted world. Follow him in his patient submission to his Father's will, and the calmness of his spirit under all trials. Follow him in his acts of disinterested benevolence, in his compassion to the unhappy, in his readiness to oblige, to assist, and to relieve. Imitate the mildness and gentleness of his manners. Imitate the affability and condescension which appeared in his behaviour. Imitate the uncorrupted simplicity and purity which distinguished his whole life.

THESE are much worthier and nobler objects of your attention, than any of those trifling varieties which you can explore and discover in the character of those among whom you live. By lifting your view to so high a standard, you will be preserved from descending to those futile and corrupting employments of thought, which occupy the idle, the vain, and the malignant. It is incredible, how much time and attention are thrown away by men, in examining the affairs of others, and discussing their conduct. Were their time and attention thrown away only, the evil would, in some degree, be less. But they are worse than thrown away; they are not merely fruitless, but productive of much mischief. Such a habit of thought is connected with a thousand vices. It is the constant source of rash and severe censure. It arises from envy and jealousy. It fomented ill-nature and pride. It propagates misunderstanding and discord. All those evils would be prevented, if the reproof which our Lord administers in the Text came oftener home, with proper authority to the reflection of men: *What is that to thee?* Each of us have more material and important business of our own to fulfil. Our task is assigned; our part allotted. Did we suitably examine how that part was performed, we should be less disposed to busy ourselves about the concerns of others. We should discover many a disorder to be corrected at home; many a weed to be pulled out from our own grounds; much remaining to be done, in order to render ourselves useful in this world, and fit for a world to come. — Wherefore, instead of being critics on others, let us employ our criticism on ourselves. Leaving others to be judged by Him who searcheth the heart, let us implore his assistance for enabling us to act well our own part, and to follow Christ.

SERMON LIX.

ON OUR PRESENT IGNORANCE OF THE WAYS OF GOD.

JOHN, xiii. 7.

Jesus answered and said unto him, What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.

THESE words of our Lord were occasioned by a circumstance in his behaviour which appeared mysterious to his disciples. When about to celebrate his last passover, he meant to give them an instructive lesson of condescension and humility. The mode which he chose for delivering this instruction, was the emblematical action of washing their feet. When Simon Peter saw his Master addressing himself to the performance of so menial an office, he exclaims with the greatest surprise, *Lord, dost thou wash my feet?* Our Lord replies in the words of the Text, *What I do, thou knowest not now; but thou shalt know hereafter.* "My behaviour, in this instance, may seem unaccountable to you at present; but you shall afterwards receive a satisfactory explanation of the intent of that symbol which I now employ."

The expressions of a Divine Person on this occasion, can very naturally and properly be applied to various instances, where the conduct of Providence, in the administration of human affairs, remains dark and mysterious to us. *What I do, thou knowest not now.* We must for a while be kept in ignorance of the designs of Heaven. But this ignorance, though necessary at present, is not always to continue. A time shall come when a commentary shall be afforded on all that is now obscure; when the veil of mystery shall be removed; and full satisfaction be given to every rational mind. *Thou shalt know hereafter.* This is the doctrine which I purpose to illustrate in the following Discourse.

I. OUR Saviour's words lead us to observe, that many things in the conduct of Providence are at present mysterious and unintelligible. The truth of this observation will not be called in question. It is indeed very readily admitted by all; and ever since the beginning of the world has been the foundation of many a complaint, and of much scepticism concerning the government of Heaven.—That human affairs are not left to roll on according to mere chance, and that Providence interposes in them to a certain degree, is made evident by various tokens to every candid mind. But the perplexity and trouble of the thoughtful inquirer arises from observing that Providence appears not to pursue any regular or consistent plan. An unaccountable mixture of light and darkness presents itself to us, when we attempt to trace the affairs of the world up to any wise and righteous administration. We see justice and order begun; but on many occasions they seem to be deserted. The ray of light which we had traced for a while, suddenly forsakes us; and, where we had looked for the continuance of order, we meet with confusion and disappointment.

—For instance; when we examine the constitution of the human mind, we discern evident marks of its being framed with a view to favour and reward virtue. Conscience is endowed with signal authority to check vice. It brings home uneasiness and remorse to the bad; and it soothes and supports the righteous with self-approbation and peace. The ordinary course of human things is made to coincide in some degree with this constitution of our nature. The worthy and the good are, in general, honoured and esteemed. *He that walketh uprightly* is, for the most part, found to *walk surely*. The chief misfortunes that befall us in life can be traced to some vices or follies which we have committed; and it almost never happens but the *sinner's own wickedness is made, sooner or later, to reprove him, and his backslidings to correct him.*

All this carries the impress of a just Providence, of a wise and a benevolent administration of the universe. We cannot avoid perceiving that the Almighty hath *set his throne for judgment*. At the same time, when we pursue our inquiries, the Almighty appears to *hold back the face of his throne, and to spread his cloud upon it.** For in looking abroad into the world, how many scenes do we behold which are far from corresponding with any ideas we could form of the government of Heaven? Many nations of the earth we see lying in a state of barbarity and misery; sunk in such gross ignorance as degrades them below the rank of rational beings; or abandoned to be the prey of cruel oppression and tyranny. When we look to the state of individuals around us, we hear the lamentations of the unhappy on every hand. We meet with weeping parents, and mourning friends. We behold the young cut off in the flower of their days, and the aged left desolate in the midst of sorrows. The useful and virtuous are swept away, and the worthless left to flourish. The lives of the best men are often filled with discouragements and disappointed hopes. Merit languishes in neglected solitude; and vanity and presumption gain the admiration of the world. From the scourge of calumny, and from the hand of violence, the injured look up to God as the Avenger of their cause; but often they look up in vain. *He is a God that hideth himself.* He dwelleth, as to them, in the secret place of darkness; or, if he dwelleth in light, it is in *light to which no man can approach*. Resignation may seal up their lips; but in silence they drop the tear, and mourn while they adore.

* Such, it must not be dissembled, are the difficulties which encounter us when we attempt to trace the present ways of God. At the same time, upon reflection, we may be satisfied that causes can be assigned for things appearing in this unfavourable light; and that there is no reason to be surprised at the divine conduct being mysterious at present.

The monarchy of the universe is a great and complicated system. It comprehends numberless generations of men, who are brought forth to act their parts for purposes unknown to us. It includes two worlds at once; the world that now is, and which is only a small portion of existence; and a world that is to come, which endures for

* Job, xvi, 9.

eternity. To us, no more than the beginnings of things are visible. We see only some broken parts of a great whole. We trace but a few links of that chain of being, which, by secret connexions, binds together the present and the future. Such knowledge is afforded us as is sufficient for supplying the exigencies and wants of our present state; but it does no more. Peeping abroad from a dark corner of the universe, we attempt in vain to explore the counsels that govern the world. It is an attempt to sound an unfathomable deep with a scanty line; and with a feeble wing to ascend above the stars. In any complicated work, even of human art, it is found necessary to be acquainted with the design of the whole, in order to judge of the fitness of its parts. In a scheme so complex as the administration of the world, where all the parts refer to one another, and where what is seen is often subordinate to what is invisible, how is it possible but our judgments must be often erroneous, and our complaints ill-founded? If a peasant or a cottager be incapable of judging of the government of a mighty empire, is it surprising that we should be at a loss concerning the conduct of the Almighty towards his creatures? *What I do, thou knowest not now.*

BUT, on this argument still more can be said for our satisfaction. We are to observe, that complete information respecting the ways of God, not only was not to be expected here; but, moreover, that it would have been hurtful, if granted to us in our present state. It would have proved inconsistent with that state; with the actions which we have to perform in it, and the duties we have to fulfil. It would indeed have overthrown the whole design of our being placed in this world. We are placed here under the trial of our virtue. Ignorance of the events that are ordained to befall us, ignorance of the plans and decrees of Heaven, enter necessarily into a state of trial. In order to exercise both our intellectual and moral powers, and to carry them forward to improvement, we must be left to find our way in the midst of difficulties and doubts, of hardships and sufferings. We must be taught to act our part with constancy, though the reward of our constancy be distant. We must learn to bear with patience whatever our Creator judges proper to lay upon us, though we see not the reason of the hardships he inflicts. If we were let into the secret of the whole plan of Providence; if the justice of Heaven were, in every step of its procedure, made manifest to our view, man would no longer be the creature he now is, nor would his present state answer any purpose of discipline or trial.

Mystery and darkness, therefore, must of necessity now take place in the course of things. Our present state can be no other than a state of twilight or dawn, where dubious forms shall often present themselves to us, and where we shall find ourselves in a middle condition between complete light and total darkness. Had we enjoyed the evidence of a just Judge ruling the earth, and of his providence interposing in our affairs, virtue would have been altogether deprived of its encouragement and support. Had the evidence, on the other hand, been so strong as to place the hand of the Almighty constantly

before our eyes, the intention of our present existence would have been defeated, and no trial of virtue have remained. Instead, therefore, of complaining of the obscurity which at present covers the conduct of Providence, we see that, on the whole, we have reason to submit and adore.

II. THE Text suggests that, though what God is doing, or what he intends to do, we *know not now*, yet there is ground to believe, that, at some future period, we shall receive information. *What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.* The question here arises, what that *hereafter* is, to which we are to look for the solution of our present doubts?

IN the first place, *Hereafter* may, on some occasions, refer to the subsequent course of events in this world. It often happens, that the consequences of things throw light on the designs of God. The history of Providence, in proportion as it advances, disembroils itself. Though our present condition forbids extensive and complete information, yet as much is sometimes allowed to appear as gives us favourable openings into the righteous and benevolent counsels of Heaven. — Thus, in the public affairs of the world, it has been frequently seen, that from the most unpromising causes, important and beneficent effects have, in the sequel, arisen. In our own country, at one period, the violent passions of a prince gave beginning to the Reformation. At another period, arbitrary attempts against religion and liberty occasioned that happy Revolution which has formed the æra of national prosperity. In many instances, *the wrath of man* has been made to *praise God*. Those wars and commotions that shake the moral world, have answered similar purposes with tempests in the natural world, of purging the air from noxious vapours, and restoring it to a temperature more sound and wholesome. From the midst of confusion, order has been made to spring; and from temporary mischiefs, lasting advantages to arise. — In all cases of this nature, with which sacred and civil history abounds, secret designs of Heaven were going on, which were unfolded in the end. The wheel was always in motion. The hand of the clock was advancing with unperceived progress, till the moment came of its striking the appointed hour.

In like manner, with respect to individuals, there is often a *hereafter* in the course of their lives, which discloses and justifies the ways of God. Not to mention the good effects which misfortunes are found to produce on the minds of men, by checking their vices and correcting their errors, innumerable exemplifications can be given, of misfortunes paving their way to future advancement in the world. We are always querulous and impatient when designs succeed not according to our wish. Ignorant of what futurity is to bring forward, occupied with nothing but the present, we exclaim, Where is God? Where the sceptre of righteousness? *Hath he forgotten to be gracious?* or doth he indeed see, and is there knowledge in the Most High? *God seeth not as man seeth*: He looketh not merely to *what* you suffer, but to *what* the effect of these sufferings is to be. Consider only in how different a light the Patriarch Joseph

would view the events of his life, after he had seen in what they had terminated, from the light in which he saw them, when led away by the Ishmaelites as a slave, or when thrown by Potiphar into the Egyptian prison. We murmur against Providence, just as the impetuous youth frets against his instructors and tutors, who are keeping him under a strict, and, as he thinks, a needless, discipline. He knows not that, by their instruction and discipline, they are laying the foundation of his future fortunes; of the wealth which he is to acquire, and of the advancement to which he is to rise in the world. What may justly be said to him by his tutors and instructors, is equally applicable to us all, under our present state of education; *What I do, thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter.*—Regarding, then, the unknown issue of all worldly events in this life, let us never despair; let us never think dishonourably of the government of God; but have patience till his providence accomplish its designs in its own way, and at its own time. *Although thou sayest thou shalt not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him.**

IN the second place, The expression of *hereafter* in the Text must be understood to refer, in its full extent, not to future events in this life, but to a subsequent state of being. For this life is no more than the beginning of the mighty and extensive plans of Providence. The seeds are only now sown, of what is to ripen and come forth, at the harvest of the world; when the revolution of the great moral year shall be finished, and the government of God shall obtain its full completion. It is the chief scope of religion to direct our view to this period; and it hath often taught us, that the knowledge of the ways of God, then enjoyed by the blessed, shall constitute a chief article of their felicity. *Now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face. Now we know in part; but then we shall know even as we are known. When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.† In God's light we shall see light.‡* The reasons that required obscurity to remain for a while on the ways of God, no longer subsist. The education of good men is completed; and the intention of those steps of education, which once they could not comprehend, now becomes apparent.—Why this man was prematurely carried away from the world in the beginning of a promising course; why that deserving family were left overwhelmed with grief and despair, by the loss of one who was their sole benefactor and support; why friendships cemented by tender ties were suddenly torn asunder by death: these are inquiries to which we can now make no reply; and which throw a dark gloom over the conduct of the Almighty. But the spirits of the just above, who are admitted to a larger view of the ways of God, see the reasons of such counsels. They see that one man was seasonably taken away from dangers and evils to come, which, unknown to him, were hovering over his head. They see that Providence was in secret preparing unexpected blessings for the family who appeared to be left disconsolate and hopeless. They see that it was time for friendships to be dissolved, when their longer continuance would to some of the parties have proved a snare.

* Job, xxxv. 14.

† 1 Cor. xiii. 12. 10.

‡ Psalm xxxvi. 9.

Where we behold nothing but the rod of power stretched forth, they discern an interposition of the hand of mercy.

Let us wait till this promised *hereafter* arrive, and we shall in like manner be satisfied concerning the events that now disturb and perplex us. We shall then know why so much darkness and misery have been so long permitted to remain on the earth, and so much oppression and tyranny to prevail among the nations. We shall see rising, as from the ashes of the old world, a new and beautiful structure; *new heavens, and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.* As wide as is the difference between the appearance of the world, when it lay in its primitive chaos, *without form and void*, and the appearance it has now assumed, when resplendent with the light of the sun, and decked with the beauties of nature; such is the difference between the divine plans in their beginnings, and in their full completion. At the conclusion, and not till then, the glory of the Lord shall become manifest to all; and, as it is described in the book of the Revelation, a voice shall be heard *from every creature which is in heaven, and on the earth, and under the earth, saying, Blessing and honour, and power and glory, be to him that sitteth on the throne. Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty: just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.**

APPLICATION of the doctrines that have been illustrated may be made to two classes of men.

First, To sceptics; who, from the present mysterious conduct of Providence, hastily draw the conclusion, that no government is exercised over human affairs, but that all things are suffered indiscriminately to come alike to all men.—I have shown that, from the inadequate views which we are at present able to take of the general system, such mysterious appearances of Providence must be expected to take place. Not only so, but I have also shown it to be fit and necessary that this mixture of obscurity should now remain; as a full display of regular justice and order would be inconsistent with the moral improvement of men in this life.—Let me desire the sceptic to look to the state of the natural world. When he thinks of the order and magnificence that prevail in it, he will, perhaps, be unwilling to pronounce it the mere production of chance. He cannot but recognise the hand of Intelligence, and acknowledge it to have proceeded from a designing Cause. I ask him, Whether in the natural world he discerns not as many mysterious and puzzling appearances as are to be found in the moral world? Are not destructive storms, burning mountains, uninhabitable deserts, as difficult to be reconciled to his preconceived ideas of supreme wisdom and goodness in the Creator, as the sufferings and afflictions which in the course of Providence befall the just? The natural and moral world are, in this respect, counterparts to one another. Both are marked with the same characters, and carry the impress of the same powerful and gracious hand. In both, it is evidently the intention of the first Author, not to render every thing level to our capacity; but, in the midst of high design and order, to allow certain objects to appear, which contradict

* Rev. v. 13. — xv. 3.

the ideas we had formed, and mock our vain researches. Now, if we are obliged to admit that the order and beauty of the natural world sufficiently prove it to be the work of a wise Creator, notwithstanding the seeming deformities which it exhibits; are we not led by the same train of reasoning to conclude, that the moral world is under the direction of a wise Governour, though much of what he now does we cannot satisfactorily explain?

Secondly, THE doctrine of the Text is to be applied not only for silencing sceptics, but for comforting the pious. Never let them be dejected by the darkness which now covers the ways of the Almighty. If he withdraw himself from their view, it is not because he neglects them; but because they are incapable of comprehending his designs; because it were not for their good that all his designs were revealed to them. — Instead of perplexing themselves about what is obscure, let them rest on the clear and authentic discoveries that have been given of the Divine goodness. Let them rest on those great and signal facts that prove it; particularly on that illustrious fact, the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. He that *spared not his own Son, but gave him up for us all*, will assuredly not always conceal himself from those who serve him. Though what he does they *know not now*, the time approaches when *they shall know hereafter*. Till that time come, let them believe and trust; let them hope and adore. From this conclusion let them never depart, that to *fear God, and keep his commandments*, is in every situation the truest wisdom; that, if there be government in the universe at all, the virtuous and the worthy are loved and protected by Heaven; that in *due season they shall reap, if they faint not*; for *the care of them is with the Lord, and their reward with the Most High*.

SERMON LX.

ON THE SLAVERY OF VICE

2 PETER, ii. 19.

While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the servants of corruption; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

BONDAGE and subjection are disagreeable sounds to the ear, disagreeable ideas to the mind. The advocates of vice, taking advantage of those natural impressions, have in every age employed them for discrediting religion. They represent it as the bondage and confinement of the free-born soul of man; as a state of perpetual constraint, formed by a system of severe rules, which designing men have contrived to impose as fetters on the multitude. On the other hand, they paint a licentious course to themselves, and hold it out to the world, as the gay and pleasurable enjoyment of life; where, having surmounted the prejudices of education, and the timorous scruples of

conscience, men can think and act at pleasure, and give full scope to every wish of the heart. — But what if those pretended sons of freedom be themselves held in miserable subjection, and their boasts of liberty be no more than the *swelling words of vanity*? The Apostle asserts in the Text, that, while they *promise liberty* to others, they are the *servants*, or slaves, of *corruption, overcome and brought into bondage by it*. This assertion of the Apostle I purpose to illustrate. I shall endeavour to make it appear, that no true liberty can arise from vice; that bad men undergo the worst servitude; and that no one is free, but he who is virtuous and good.

It is necessary to begin with removing false ideas of liberty, and showing in what it truly consists. We are not to imagine, that to be free, imports our being set loose from restraint or rule of every kind. No man, in any condition of life, is at liberty to act always as he pleases, and to gratify every wish he forms. The nature of the human state necessarily imposes on all men various restraints. The laws of society allow no one to indulge himself in pursuits or pleasures that are injurious to his neighbour. Even our own nature limits our pleasures within certain bounds. All our desires cannot be gratified together. They frequently interfere, and require him who would indulge one favourite passion, to deny himself in another. Distinctions, therefore, must be made, preferences be given, and some general regulations of conduct be observed, by every one who consults his own welfare. If there be any regulation which ensures us of safety and happiness, to be disengaged from the observance of that regulation is no article of liberty; at least of such liberty as a wise man would wish to enjoy. It is in effect to be turned loose to our own ruin. It is such liberty as a blind man enjoys, of wandering at random, and striking into every devious path, without a guide to direct his steps, and save him from destruction.

That unbounded licentiousness, therefore, which sinners prefer to every regulation of conduct, is altogether different from true freedom. It is in moral behaviour the same as anarchy is in a state, where law and order are extinct. Anarchy, surely, is no less incompatible with true liberty, than absolute despotism; and of the two, it is hard to say which is the least eligible, or the most miserable state. Liberty by no means supposes the absence of all government. It only supposes that the government under which we are placed is wise; and that the restraints to which we voluntarily submit ourselves have been contrived for the general interest.

To be free, therefore, imports, in general, our being placed in such circumstances, that, within the bounds of justice and good order, we can act according to our own deliberate choice, and take such measures for our conduct as we have reason to believe are conducive to our welfare; without being obstructed either by external force, or by violent internal impulse. This is that happy and dignified state which every wise man earnestly wishes to enjoy. The advantages which result from it are chiefly these three: freedom of choice; independence of mind; boldness and security. In opposition to these distinguishing characters of liberty, I now proceed to

show that, in the first place, vice deprives bad men of free choice in their actions; that, in the second place, it brings them under a slavish dependence on external circumstances; and that, in the third place, it reduces them to that abject, cowardly, and disquieted state which is essentially characteristic of bondage.

I. VICE is inconsistent with liberty, as it deprives sinners of the power of free choice, by bringing them under the dominion of passions and habits. Religion and virtue address themselves to reason. They call us to look round on every side; to think well of the consequences of our actions; and, before we take any step of importance, to compare the good with the evil that may ensue from it. He therefore who follows their dictates, acts the part of a man who freely consults, and chooses, for his own interest. But vice can make no pretensions of this kind. It awaits not the test of deliberate comparison and choice; but overpowers us at once by some striking impression of present advantage or enjoyment. It hurries us with the violence of passion; captivates us by the allurements of pleasure; or dazzles us by the glare of riches. The sinner yields to the impulse, merely because he cannot resist it. Reason remonstrates; conscience endeavours to check him; but all in vain. Having once allowed some strong passion to gain the ascendant, he has thrown himself into the middle of a torrent, against which he may sometimes faintly struggle, but the impetuosity of the stream bears him along. In this situation he is so far from being free, that he is not master of himself. He does not go, but is driven; tossed, agitated, and impelled; passive, like a ship, to the violence of the waves.

After passion has for a while exercised its tyrannical sway, its vehemence may by degrees subside. But when, by long indulgence, it has established habits of gratification, the sinner's bondage becomes then more confirmed, and more miserable. For, during the heat of pursuit, he is little capable of reflection. But when his ardour is abated, and, nevertheless, a vicious habit rooted, he has full leisure to perceive the heavy yoke he has brought upon himself. How many slaves do we see in the world to intemperance, and all kinds of criminal pleasure, merely through the influence of customs, which they had allowed to become so inveterate, that it was not in their power to alter them? Are they not often reduced to a condition so wretched, that when their licentious pleasures have become utterly insipid, they are still forced to continue them, solely because they cannot refrain; not because the indulgence gives them pleasure, but because abstinence would give them pain; and this too, even when they are obliged at last to condemn their habits of life, as injuring their fortune, impairing their constitution, or disgracing their character? Vice is not of such a nature that we can say to it, *Hitherto shalt thou come, and no farther*. Having once entered into its territories, it is not in our power to make a retreat when we please. *He that committeth sin, is the servant of sin*. No man who has once yielded up the government of his mind, and given loose rein to his desires and passions, can tell how far these may carry him. He may be brought

into such a desperate state, that nothing shall remain for him but to look back with regret upon the forsaken path of innocence and liberty; and, severely conscious of the thralldom he suffers, to groan under fetters which he despairs of throwing off. *Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, who are accustomed to do evil.**

Vice confirms its dominion, and extends it still farther over the soul, by compelling the sinner to support one crime by means of another. Not only is he enslaved to those vices which take their rise from his own inclination, but they render others necessary, to which, against his inclination, he must submit; and thereby strengthen the commanding power of iniquity within him. The immoderate love of pleasure, for instance, leads him into expence beyond his fortune. In order to support that expence, he is obliged to have recourse to low and dishonourable methods of gain, which originally he despised. To cover these, he is forced upon arts of dissimulation and fraud. One instance of fraud obliges him to support it by another; till, in the end, there arises a character of complicated vice; of luxury shooting forth into baseness, dishonesty, injustice, and perhaps cruelty. It is thus that one favourite passion brings in a tribe of auxiliaries to complete the dominion of sin. Among all our corrupt passions, there is a strong and intimate connexion. When any one of them is adopted into our family, it never quits us until it has fathered upon us all its kindred.—By such means as these, by the violence of passions, by the power of habits, and by the connexion of one vice with another, sin establishes that servitude over the will, which deprives bad men of all power of free choice in their actions.

H. THE slavery produced by vice appears in the dependence under which it brings the sinner to circumstances of external fortune. One of the favourite characters of liberty, is the independence it bestows. He who is truly a free man, is above all servile compliances, and abject subjection. He is able to rest upon himself; and, while he regards his superiours with proper deference, neither debases himself by cringing to them, nor is tempted to purchase their favour by dishonourable means. But the sinner has forfeited every privilege of this nature. His passions and habits render him an absolute dependant on the world, and the world's favour; on the uncertain goods of fortune, and the fickle humours of men. For it is by these he subsists, and among these his happiness is sought; according as his passions determine him to pursue pleasure, riches, or preferments. Having no fund within himself whence to draw enjoyment, his only resource is in things without. His hopes and fears all hang upon the world. He partakes in all its vicissitudes; and is moved and shaken by every wind of fortune. This is to be, in the strictest sense, a slave to the world.

Religion and virtue, on the other hand, confer on the mind principles of noble independence. *The upright man is satisfied from himself.* He despises not the advantages of fortune; but he centers not his happiness in them. With a moderate share of them, he can be

* Jer. xlii. 23.

contented; and contentment is felicity. Happy in his own integrity, conscious of the esteem of good men, reposing firm trust in the providence and the promises of God, he is exempted from servile dependence on other things. He can wrap himself up in a good conscience, and look forward, without terror, to the change of the world. Let all things shift around him as they please, he believes that, by the divine ordination, they shall be made *to work together* in the issue *for his good*: And therefore, having much to hope from God, and little to fear from the world, he can be easy in every state. One who possesses within himself such an establishment of mind, is truly free. — But shall I call that man free, who has nothing that is his own, nor property assured; whose very heart is not his own, but rendered the appendage of external things, and the sport of fortune? Is that man free, let his outward condition be ever so splendid, whom his imperious passions detain at their call, whom they send forth at their pleasure to drudge and toil, and to beg his only enjoyment from the casualties of the world? Is he free, who must flatter and lie, to compass his ends; who must bear with this man's caprice, and that man's scorn; must profess friendship where he hates, and respect where he contemns; who is not at liberty to appear in his own colours, nor to speak his own sentiments; who dares not be honest, lest he should be poor? — Believe it, no chains bind so hard, no fetters are so heavy, as those which fasten the corrupted heart to this treacherous world; no dependence is more contemptible than that under which the voluptuous, the covetous, or the ambitious man lies, to the means of pleasure, gain, or power. Yet this is the boasted liberty, which vice promises, as the recompence of setting us free from the salutary restraints of virtue.

III. ANOTHER character of the slavery of vice, is that mean, cowardly, and disquieted state to which it reduces the sinner. Boldness and magnanimity have ever been accounted the native effects of liberty. He who enjoys it, having nothing to apprehend from oppressive power, performs the offices, and enjoys the comforts of life, with a manly and undisturbed mind. Hence his behaviour is dignified, and his sentiments are honourable; while he who is accustomed to bend under servile subjection, has always been found mean-spirited, timorous, and base. — Compare, in these respects, the virtuous and the vicious man, and you will easily see to which of them the characteristics of freedom most justly belong. The man of virtue, relying on a good conscience and the protection of Heaven, acts with firmness and courage; and, in the discharge of his duty, fears not the face of man. The man of vice, conscious of his low and corrupt aims, shrinks before the steadfast and piercing eye of integrity; is ever looking around him with anxious and fearful circumspection, and thinking of subterfuges, by which he may escape from danger. The one is *bold as a lion*; the other *fieth when no man pursueth*. To the one, nothing appears contemptible, by which he can procure any present advantage. The other looks with disdain on whatever would degrade his character. “I will not,” says he, “so demean myself, as to catch the favour of the greatest man, by

“this or that low art. It shall not be said or thought of me, that I did what was base, in order to make my fortune. Let others stoop so low, who cannot be without the favours of the world. But I can want them, and therefore at such a price I will not purchase them.” This is the voice of true liberty; and speaks that greatness of mind which it is formed to inspire.

Corresponding to that abject disposition which characterises a bad man, are the fears that haunt him. The terrors of a slave dwell on his mind, and often appear in his behaviour. For guilt is never free from suspicion and alarm. The sinner is afraid, sometimes, of the partners of his crimes, lest they betray him; sometimes, of those who have suffered by his crimes, lest they revenge themselves; frequently, of the world around him, lest it detect him; and, what is worst of all, he is reduced to be afraid of himself. There is a witness within him, that testifies against his misdeeds; and threatens him in secret, when other alarms leave him. Conscience holds up to his view the image of his past crimes, with this inscription engraved upon it, “*God will bring every work into judgment.*” How opposite is such a state as this, to the peaceful security arising from the liberty enjoyed by the virtuous? — Were there nothing more in the circumstances of sinners to affix upon them the marks of servitude, this alone would be sufficient, that, as the Scripture expresses it, *through fear of death they are all their lifetime subject to bondage.** Death sets all other captives free. The slave who digs in the mine, or labours at the oar, can rejoice at the prospect of laying down his burden together with his life; and tastes the hope of being at last on equal terms with his cruel oppressor. But, to the slave of guilt, there arises no hope from death. On the contrary, he is obliged to look forward with constant terror to this most certain of all events, as the conclusion of all his hopes, and the commencement of his greatest miseries.

I HAVE thus set before you such clear and unequivocal marks of the servitude undergone by sinners, as fully verify the assertion in the Text, that a state of vice and corruption is a state of bondage. In order to perceive how severe a bondage it is, let us attend to some peculiar circumstances of aggravation which belong to it.

First, It is a bondage to which the mind itself, the native seat of liberty, is subjected. In other cases, a brave man can comfort himself with reflecting that, let tyrants do their worst, let prisons or fetters be his lot, his mind remains unconquered and free. Of this liberty, they cannot rob him; here he moves in a higher sphere, above the reach of oppression or confinement. But what avails the show of external liberty, to one who has lost the government of himself? As our Saviour reasons in another case, *If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness?* So we may reason here, if that part of thy nature, thy mind, thy will, by which only thou canst enjoy and relish liberty, be itself in bondage to evil passions and habits, how miserable must be that bondage?

Next, It is aggravated by this consideration, that it is a bondage which we have brought upon ourselves. To have been forced into

* Heb. ii. 15.

slavery, is misfortune and misery. But to have renounced our liberty and chosen to be slaves, is the greatest reproach added to the greatest misery. Moments there frequently must be, when a sinner is sensible of the degradation of his state; when he feels with pain the slavish dependence under which he is brought to fortune and the world, to violent passions and settled habits, and to fears and apprehensions arising from conscious guilt. In such moments, how cruel is the reflection, that of all this disgrace and misery he has been the author to himself; that, by voluntary compliance, he has given to his passions that haughty ascendant which they now exercise over him; has forged the chains with which he is bound, and sold himself to do iniquity?

Lastly, The servitude of vice is accompanied with this farther aggravation, that it is subjection to our own servants. Those desires and passions, which the sinner has raised to lawless rule, were given us as instruments of self-preservation; but were plainly designed to be under the direction of a higher power. Of themselves, they are headstrong and blind; they bear all the marks of intended subordination; and conscience is invested with every ensign of authority and supremacy. But sin inverts the whole frame of human nature. It compels reason to bow down before those passions which it was formed to command; and leads it, as it were, in triumph, to grace the shameful conquest of its ministers and servants. It has been always observed, that none are so insolent in power, as they who have usurped an authority to which they had no right; and so it is found to hold in this instance. The desires and passions of a vicious man, having once obtained an unlimited sway, trample him under their feet. They make him feel that he is subject to divers, and contradictory as well as imperious masters, who often pull him different ways. His soul is rendered the receptacle of many repugnant and jarring dispositions; and resembles some barbarous country, cantoned out into different principalities, who are continually waging war on one another. — Such is the state into which sinners have brought themselves, in order to be free from the supposed confinement of virtue. Where they had promised themselves nothing but ease and pleasure, they are made to experience restraints more severe, and mortifications more painful, than any which they would have undergone under the discipline of religion.

It will perhaps be contended by some, that although the representation which has now been given of the slavery of sin holds true in certain instances, yet that it is applicable only to those who come under the description of atrocious sinners. They imagine that a certain moderate course may be held in vice, by means of which, men, without throwing altogether aside the restraints of reason, may enjoy an easy and pleasurable life. — By reasoning thus, my friends, you flatter and deceive yourselves to your own destruction. Be assured that, by every vicious indulgence, you are making an approach to a state of complete slavery; you are forfeiting a certain share of your liberty; how soon the whole of it may be forfeited, you are not aware. It is true, that all which has now been said of the servitude

of sin, applies only to a character corrupted in the extreme. But remember, that to this extreme no man ever arrives at once. He passes through many of those intermediate stages, in one of which you are now perhaps found. Vice always creeps by degrees; and insensibly twines around us those concealed fetters by which we are at last completely bound. — As you value therefore your liberty and your happiness, avoid every approach to evil. Consider all vicious pleasures as enchanted ground, by entering on which, you will be farther and farther ensnared within the magic circle, till at length you are precluded from all retreat. The most pure and virtuous man is always the freest. The religion of Christ is justly entitled the *perfect law of liberty*.* It is only when the *Son makes us free*, that we are free indeed: and it was with reason the Psalmist said, *I will walk at liberty, for I seek thy precepts*.†

SERMON LXI.

ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PUBLIC WORSHIP.

PSALM xxvi. 8.

Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.

GOD is a Spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth. That religion chiefly consists in an inward principle of goodness, is beyond dispute, and that its value and efficacy are derived from its effects in purifying the heart, and reforming the life. All external services, which have not this tendency, are entirely insignificant. They degenerate into mere superstition, equally unacceptable to God, and unprofitable to man. Hence they are so often reprobated in Scripture with high contempt, when substituted in the room of the important duties of a virtuous life.

Notwithstanding this, it is certain that external services have their own place, and a considerable one too, in the system of religion. What their proper place is, no one can be at a loss to discern, who will only make a just distinction between the means, and the end, in religion. It is evident there is danger in man's erring here, either on one side or other; and it is certain that they have erred on both. After it was observed, that mankind were prone to lay too much weight on the external parts of religion, it began to be thought that no weight was to be allowed to them at all. The time was, when all religion centered in attending the duties of the church, and paying veneration to whatever was accounted sacred. This alone sanctified the character, and compensated every blemish in moral conduct. From this extreme, the spirit of the age seems to be running fast into the opposite extreme, of holding every thing light that belongs to public worship. But if superstition be an evil, and a very great

* James, i. 1.

† Psalm cxix. 45.

one it undoubtedly is, irreligion is not a smaller evil: And though the *form of godliness* may often remain, when the *power* of it is wanting; yet the *power* cannot well subsist where the *form* is altogether gone. — The holy Psalmist, whose words are now before us, discovers much better principles. Expressing always the highest regard for the laws of God, and the precepts of virtue, he breathes at the same time a spirit of pure devotion. Though loaded with the cares of royalty, and encircled with the splendour of a court, he thought it well became him to show respect to the great Lord of nature; and on many occasions expresses, as he does in the Text, his delight in the public service of the temple. *Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.* In discoursing from which words I purpose to show the importance of the public worship of God, and the benefits resulting from it. I shall consider it in three lights: as it respects God; as it respects the world; as it respects ourselves.

I. LET us consider it with respect to God. If there exist a Supreme Being, the Creator of the world, no consequence appears more natural and direct than this, that he ought to be worshipped by his creatures, with every outward expression of submission and honour. We need only appeal to every man's heart, whether this be not a principle which carries along with it its own obligation, that to Him who is the Fountain of our life and the Father of our mercies; to Him who has raised up that beautiful structure of the universe in which we dwell, and where we are surrounded with so many blessings and comforts; solemn acknowledgements of gratitude should be made, praises and prayers should be offered, and all suitable marks of dependence on him be expressed. — This obligation extends beyond the silent and secret sentiments of our hearts. Besides private devotion, it naturally leads to associations for public worship; to open and declared professions of respect for the Deity. Where blessings are received in common, an obligation lies upon the community, jointly to acknowledge them. Sincere gratitude is always of an open and diffusive nature. It loves to pour itself forth; to give free vent to its emotions; and, before the world, to acknowledge and honour a benefactor.

So consonant is this to the natural sentiments of mankind, that all the nations of the earth have, as with one consent, agreed to institute some forms of worship; to hold meetings, at certain times, in honour of their deities. Survey the societies of men in their rudest state; explore the African deserts, the wilds of America, or the distant islands of the ocean; and you will find that over all the earth some religious ceremonies have obtained. You will every-where trace, in one form or other, the temple, the priest, and the offering. The prevalence of the most absurd superstitions furnishes this testimony to the truth, that in the hearts of all men the principle is engraved, of worship being due to that invisible Power who rules the world. — Herein consists the great excellency of the Christian religion, that it hath instructed us in the simple and spiritual nature of that worship. Disencumbered of idle and unmeaning ceremonies, its ritual is pure,

and worthy of a divine Author. Its positive institutions are few in number, most significant of spiritual things, and directly conducive to good life and practice. How inexcusable then are we, if, placed in such happy circumstances, the sense of those obligations to the public worship of God shall be obliterated among us, which the light of nature inculcated, in some measure, on the most wild and barbarous nations?

The refinements of false philosophy have indeed suggested this shadow of objection, that God is too great to stand in need of any external service from his creatures; that our expressions of praise and honour are misplaced with respect to Him, who is above all honour and all praise; that, in his sight, the homage we seek to pay, must appear contemptible; and is therefore in itself superfluous and trifling. — But who hath taught those vain reasoners, that all expressions of gratitude and honour towards a superiour become unsuitable, merely because that superiour needs not any returns? Were they ever indebted to one whose favours they had it not in their power to repay, and did they, on that account, feel themselves set loose from every obligation to acknowledge, and to praise their benefactor? On the contrary, the more disinterested his beneficence was, did not gratitude, in any ingenuous mind, burn with the greater ardour, and prompt them the more eagerly to seize every opportunity of publicly testifying the feelings of their hearts? — Almighty God, it is true, is too great to need our service or homage. But he is also too good not to accept it, when it is the native expression of a grateful and generous mind. If pride and self-sufficiency stifle all sentiments of dependence on our Creator; if levity, and attachment to worldly pleasures, render us totally neglectful of expressing our thankfulness to Him for his blessings; do we not hereby discover such a want of proper feeling, such a degree of hardness and corruption in our affections, as shows us to be immoral and unworthy; and must justly expose us to the high displeasure of Heaven? On the contrary, according to every notion which we can form of the Father of the universe, must it not be acceptable to him to behold his creatures properly affected in heart towards their great Benefactor; assembling together to express, in acts of worship, that gratitude, love, and reverence which they owe him; and thus nourishing and promoting in one another an affectionate sense of his goodness? Are not such dispositions, and such a behaviour as this, intimately connected with all virtue?

O come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker. For he is our God; and we are the flock of his pasture. Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. The prayer of the upright is his delight. It cometh before him as incense, and the uplifting of their hands as the evening sacrifice. — Having thus shown the reasonableness of public worship with respect to God, let us now,

II. CONSIDER its importance in another view, as it respects the world. When we survey the general state of mankind, we find them continually immersed in worldly affairs; busied about providing the

necessaries of life, employed in the pursuits of their pleasures, or eagerly prosecuting the advancement of their interests. In such a situation of things, a small measure of reflection might convince any one, that without some return of sacred days, and some solemn calls to public worship, it were impossible to preserve in the world any sense of objects, so foreign to the general current of thought, as an invisible Governour, and a future state. If it be of importance to the peace and good order of society, that there should prevail among men the belief of One in the heavens, who is the protector of righteousness and the avenger of crimes; if it be of importance that they be taught to look forward to a day of judgment, when they are to be brought to account for their most secret actions, and eternally rewarded or punished, according as their conduct has been good or evil; if such principles as these, I say, be of consequence to the public welfare, they certainly enforce the authority of public worship, and prove the necessity of religious instruction.

I speak now particularly with a view to the multitude, the mass and body of the people. We all know, how seldom from education, or private instruction, they have the advantage of deriving sentiments of religion or morality. Early obliged to labour for their bread, they would remain all their days in gross ignorance of every moral or sacred principle, were it not for those public assemblies in which they hear of God, and Christ, and judgment, and heaven, and hell. Shut up those temples to which they resort with reverence; exclude them from the opportunities they now possess of receiving religious instruction, and imbibing religious ideas; and what can you expect them to become? No other than a ferocious rabble, who, set free from checks of conscience, and fears of divine vengeance, would be prone to every outrage which they could commit with impunity. It is well known that, in the early ages of the world, sages and legislators, who endeavoured to tame and to associate the barbarous hordes of men, found it necessary for this purpose to have recourse to religion. By bringing the rude multitudes to worship together, and, at stated times and places, to join in hymns and songs to their deities, they gradually restrained them from violence, and trained them to subordination and civilized life.

During the progress of society in after-periods, religious assemblies at church continue, I am persuaded, to have a very considerable influence on the civilization and improvement of the people. Even independent of effect upon their moral principles, by leading numbers of them to meet together in an orderly way, and in their most decent appearance, they tend to humanize and polish their manners. They strengthen the social connexions, and promote friendly intercourse among those who are in the same neighbourhood, and in the same lines of life. It must, at the same time, be agreeable to every humane mind to think, that one day in seven is allotted for rest to the poor from their daily labours, and for such enjoyments of ease and comfort as their station affords. It is the only day which gives them occasion to feel themselves as belonging to the same class of beings with their superiours; when joining with them in the same acts of

worship, and recognizing a common Lord. Amidst those distinctions which the difference of ranks necessarily introduces into human society, it is surely fit that there be some occasions when man can meet with man as a brother, in order that the pride of the great may be checked; and the low may be taught that, if they discharge properly their appointed part, they have reason to expect from the Lord of the universe, the same rewards with the rich and the mighty.

It will, I believe, be generally admitted that forms of public worship, and means of religious instruction, are important, on several accounts, for the body of the people, and belong to the maintenance of public safety and order. But many who admit this are apt to think, that to the common people alone they may be left. To persons of liberal education and enlarged minds, what benefit can arise from hearing what they already know; and what, perhaps, is to be inculcated on them by those who are of inferior capacity to themselves?—Admitting this plea of superiority which their vanity forms, and setting aside for the present any personal obligation they are under to worship God, I must ask such persons, how they can expect that religious assemblies will be long respected by the lower ranks of men, if by men of rank and education they are discountenanced and forsaken? Do not they know, that those lower ranks are ready to copy the manners, and to follow the example, of their superiours in all things; but assuredly in nothing more, than in what appears to set them free from restraint, and to gratify licentiousness? While they acknowledge the importance, and even the necessity, of public religion to certain classes of men, do they nevertheless contribute by their behaviour to defeat the end of public religion, and to annihilate that importance which they ascribe to it?—They are employed in framing laws and statutes for preventing crimes, and keeping the disorderly multitude within bounds; and at the same time, by personally discountenancing public worship, they are weakening, they are even abolishing, among the multitude, that moral restraint, which is of more general influence upon manners than all the laws they frame. In vain they complain of the dishonesty of servants, of the insolence of mobs, of the attacks of the highwayman. To all these disorders they have themselves been accessory. By their own disregard of sacred institutions, they have disseminated profligacy among the people. They have broken down the flood-gates which served to restrain the torrent; they have let it loose to overflow the land; and by the growing deluge may themselves be swept away.—But I must next argue upon a different ground; and proceed,

III. To set forth the importance of the public worship of God to every individual in every rank of life. Whatever his station be, he is still a man; and has the duties of a man to perform. Were his attendance on divine worship of no other effect, than to add countenance to a salutary institution, this alone would render it his duty. But, moreover, we assert it to be his duty on his own account; if it be the duty of every man to use the proper means of preserving and fortifying his virtue. All the Christian institutions have a direct tendency to this end. They all serve to give warmth to piety, and

to add solemnity to moral virtue. A very high opinion, indeed, that man must have of his own character, who imagines that, amidst all the follies and corruptions of the world, he stands in need of no assistance for enabling him to act his part with propriety and dignity.

The question is not, Whether persons of rank and education are to learn any thing that is new to them, by frequenting the places of public worship? The great principles of piety and morality are obvious and easily known; and we shall readily admit, that there are many to whom no new instruction is communicated in the house of God. But, my friends, the purpose of your going there is to have known truths recalled to your mind, and their dormant influence awakened; is to have serious meditations suggested; to have good dispositions raised; to have the heart adjusted to a composed and tranquil frame. Is there any man of reason and reflection, who will not acknowledge such effects, as far as they follow from attendance on religious ordinances, to be of the most beneficial nature? These occasional cessations from the cares and anxieties of life, these interruptions to the bustle and the passions of the world, in order to think and hear of eternity, are both a relief and an improvement to the mind. By this retreat from its ordinary circle of thoughts, it is enabled to return, with more clearness and more vigour, to the business of the world, after a serious and proper pause.

But I must ask the persons with whom I now reason, whether there be no other call to come to God's house, than to hear instruction there? Is not the devout adoration of the God of heaven the principal object of our religious assemblies; and is this what any man of reflection, and of sober mind, dare to make light of? In the temple of the Lord, the rich and the poor, the prince and the peasant, appear as suppliants alike for the protection and favour of the Almighty.—Great and flourishing as thou mayest think thyself, know that thou standest as much in need of that protection, as the meanest of the crowd whom thou beholdest worshipping, with lowly reverence, the God of their fathers. The sun of prosperity shines at present on thy head, and the favourable gale carries thee softly along the stream of life. But the Almighty needs only to give the word, and instantly the tempest shall rise; and thy frail bark shall be driven into the ocean, and whelmed in the deep. *In my prosperity, I said I shall never be moved. Thou, Lord, didst hide thy face, and I was troubled. Look up, with dread, to that awful hand of Providence which is stretched over your heads. Remember the instability of all human things; remember it, and tremble, ye who despise the devout acknowledgment of Him who disposes of the human fate! Though ye live many years and rejoice in them all, remember the days of darkness; for they shall be many.**

But after all that has been urged on this subject, I am sensible it may be objected, that many who make conscience of paying strict regard to the institutions of religion, do not appear to have derived much benefit from them. They are not, it will be said, more improved in moral conduct, and in the proper discharge of the several

duties of life, than others who have been apparently negligent of the services of the church. On the contrary, a formal regard to these appears to be substituted by many, in the room of the weightier matters of the law.—Though this should be admitted, it goes no farther than to show that human weakness, or corruption, may defeat the purpose of the most promising means of moral improvement. That a superstitious attention to external worship, has too often usurped the character, and supplanted the place, of real virtue, will not be denied. Admonitions against so dangerous an error cannot be given too often. But because the best things have been often misapplied and abused, no argument thence arises for their being undervalued, and thrown aside. So also reason, instruction, and discipline of every kind, have been frequently perverted to bad ends; and yet their intrinsic worth and usefulness remain untouched and acknowledged.—Besides this, it cannot be admitted that, because religious institutions produce not all the good that might be wished, and hoped for, they therefore do no good at all. This were a rash and ill-founded conclusion. If the morals of men are not always amended by them as they ought to have been, there is reason, however, to think that they would have been worse without them. Some check is always given by them to open profligacy. Some assistance is furnished to good dispositions of heart; at least, to decency of manners. Even momentary impressions of seriousness made on the thoughtless by the solemnities of religion, are not without their fruit. They leave generally some trace behind them; and when the traces are often renewed, they may be hoped, through the divine blessing, to form at last a deep impression on the mind.

At the same time, I do not say that religious institutions work upon the mind like a charm; and that mere bodily attendance on them will always ensure us of some profitable effect. Let the means that are employed, for the improvement of rational beings, be ever so powerful in themselves, much of their success will always depend on the manner in which they are received and applied. I shall therefore conclude my reasonings on this subject, with a few observations concerning the dispositions requisite on our part, for deriving benefit from the public ordinances of religion.

THE ends for which we assemble in the house of God are two; to worship God, and to listen to religious instructions.

The public worship of God is the chief and most sacred purpose of every religious assembly of Christians. Let it here be remembered, that it is not the uttering, or the hearing of certain words, that constitutes the worship of the Almighty. It is the heart that praises, or prays. If the heart accompany not the words that are spoken or heard, we *offer the sacrifice of fools*. By the inattentive thought, and the giddy and wandering eye, we profane the temple of the Lord, and turn the appearance of devotion into insult and mockery.

With regard to religious instruction, attention and reverence are unquestionably due. All religious and moral knowledge comes from God. It is a light from heaven, first transmitted to man by the ori-

ginal constitution of his nature, and afterwards made to shine with fairer and fuller lustre by the revelation of the Gospel in Jesus Christ. Its brightness may sometimes be stronger, and sometimes weaker, according to the mediums by which it is conveyed. But still, as far as the instructions delivered from the pulpit are illuminated by the ray from heaven, they are the truths of God, and ought to be received as such. Refinements of vain philosophy, or intricate subtilties of theological controversy, are undoubtedly not entitled to such regard. But when the great principles of natural or revealed religion are discussed; when the important doctrines of the Gospel concerning the life, and sufferings, and death of our blessed Redeemer are displayed; or useful instructions regarding the regulation of life, and the proper discharge of our several duties, are the subjects brought into view; it is not then the human speaker, but the divine authority, that is to be regarded.

In the speaker, many imperfections and infirmities may be discovered. The discoveries of the Gospel are represented in Scripture, as a hidden treasure brought to light; but, by the appointment of God, *we have this treasure in earthen vessels.** It is not the spirit of curiosity that ought to bring us to church. Too often, it is to be feared, we assemble there merely as critics on the preacher; critics on his sentiments, his language, and his delivery. But, such are not the dispositions which become us on so serious an occasion. It is with humility, with fairness, and candour, with an intention to improve ourselves in piety and virtue, with a view to make personal application to our own character, that we ought to hear the word of God. — When we enter the sacred temple, let us ever consider ourselves as creatures surrounded with darkness, seeking illumination from Heaven; as guilty creatures, imploring forgiveness from our Judge; as frail and mortal creatures, preparing for that eternal habitation into which we know not how soon we are to pass.

If with such sentiments and impressions we join in the worship of God, and the ordinances of religion, we may justly hope that they shall be accompanied to us with the divine blessing. It is the express precept of God, *not to forsake the assembling of ourselves together.† Gather together the people, men, women, and children, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this law.‡ Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise. Give unto the Lord the glory due to his name.* — Thus hath God commanded, and he never commanded his people to seek his name in vain. For, *where two or three are gathered together in his name, our Lord hath told us, that he is in the midst of them.§ God hath said, that he loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob.|| The prayer of the upright is his delight.* Both in their temporal and spiritual concerns, they may be most expected to prosper, who can say with the Psalmist in the Text, *Lord, I have loved the habitation of thy house, and the place where thine honour dwelleth.*

* 2 Cor. iv. 7.

† Deut. xxxi. 12.

‡ Psalm lxxxvii. 2.

† Heb. x. 25.

§ Matt. xviii. 20.

SERMON LXII.

ON THE FASHION OF THE WORLD PASSING AWAY.

1 COR. vii. 31.

— *The fashion of this world passeth away.*

To use this world so as not to abuse it, is one of the most important, and at the same time one of the most difficult lessons which religion teaches. By so many desires and passions we are connected with the objects around us, that our attachment to them is always in hazard of becoming excessive and sinful. Hence religion is often employed in moderating this attachment, by rectifying our erroneous opinions, and instructing us in the proper value we ought to set on worldly things. Such was particularly the scope of the Apostle in this context. He is putting the Corinthians in mind that their *time is short*, that every thing here is transitory; and therefore, that in all the different occupations of human life, in *weeping* and *rejoicing*, and *buying* and *possessing*, they were ever to keep in view this consideration, that *the fashion of this world passeth away*. The original expression imports the figure or form under which the world presents itself to us. The meaning is, All that belongs to this visible state is continually changing. Nothing in human affairs is fixed or stable. All is in motion and fluctuation; altering its appearance every moment, and passing into some new form. Let us meditate for a little on the serious view which is here given us of the world, in order that we may attend to the improvements which it suggests.

I. *The fashion of the world passeth away*, as the opinions, ideas, and manners of men are always changing. We look in vain for a standard to ascertain and fix any of these; in vain expect that what has been approved and established for a while, is always to endure. Principles which were of high authority among our ancestors are now exploded. Systems of philosophy, which were once universally received, and taught as infallible truths, are now obliterated and forgotten. Modes of living, behaving, and employing time, the pursuits of the busy, and the entertainments of the gay, have been entirely changed. They were the offspring of fashion, the children of a day. When they had run their course, they expired; and were succeeded by other modes of living, and thinking, and acting, which the gloss of novelty recommended for a while to the public taste.

When we read an account of the manners and occupations, of the studies and opinions, even of our own countrymen, in some remote age, we seem to be reading the history of a different world from what we now inhabit. Coming downwards, through some generations, a new face of things appears. Men begin to think, and act, in a different train; and what we call refinement gradually opens. Arriving at our own times, we consider ourselves as having widely enlarged the sphere of knowledge on every side; having formed

just ideas on every subject; having attained the proper standard of manners and behaviour; and wonder at the ignorance, the unpoliteness, and rusticity of our forefathers. But, alas! what appears to us so perfect shall in its turn pass away. The next race, while they shove us off the stage, will introduce their favourite discoveries and innovations; and what we now admire as the height of improvement, may in a few ages hence be considered as altogether rude and imperfect. As one wave effaces the ridge which the former had made on the sand by the sea-shore, so every succeeding age obliterates the opinions and modes of the age which had gone before it. *The fashion of the world is ever passing away.*

Let us only think of the changes which our own ideas and opinions undergo in the progress of life. One man differs not more from another, than the same man varies from himself in different periods of his age, and in different situations of fortune. In youth, and in opulence, every thing appears smiling and gay. We fly as on the wings of fancy; and survey beauties wherever we cast our eye. But let some more years have passed over our heads, or let disappointments in the world have depressed our spirits; and what a change takes place! The pleasing illusions that once shone before us; the splendid fabrics that imagination had reared; the enchanting maze in which we once wandered with delight, all vanish and are forgotten. The world itself remains the same. But its form, its appearance, and aspect, is changed to our view; its *fashion*, as to us, hath *passed away*.

II. WHILE our opinions and ideas are thus changing within, the condition of all external things is, at the same time, ever changing without us, and around us. Wherever we cast our eyes over the face of nature, or the monuments of art, we discern the marks of alteration and vicissitude. We cannot travel far upon the earth, without being presented with many a striking memorial of the changes made by time. What was once a flourishing city, is now a neglected village. Where castles and palaces stood, fallen towers and ruined walls appear. Where the magnificence of the great shone, and the mirth of the gay resounded, there, as the Prophet Isaiah describes, *the owl and the raven now dwell, thorns come up, and the nettle and the bramble grow in the courts.*—When we read the history of nations, what do we read but the history of incessant revolution and change? We behold kingdoms alternately rising and falling; peace and war taking place by turns; princes, heroes, and statesmen, coming forth in succession on the stage, attracting our attention for a little by the splendid figure they make, and then disappearing and forgotten. We see the *fashion of the world* assuming all its different forms, and, in all of them, *passing away*.

But to historical annals there is no occasion for our having recourse. Let any one who has made some progress in life, recollect only what he has beheld passing before him in his own time. We have seen our country rise triumphant among the nations; and we have seen it also humbled in its turn. We have seen in one hemisphere of the globe new dominions acquired; and in another

hemisphere our old dominions lost. At home, we have seen factions and parties shift through all their different forms; and administrations, in succession, rise and fall. What were once the great themes of eager discussion, and political contest, are now forgotten. Fathers recount them to their children, as the tales of other times. New actors have come forth on the stage of the world. New objects have attracted the attention, and new intrigues engaged the passions, of men. New members fill the seats of justice; new ministers the temples of religion; and a new world, in short, in the course of a few years, has gradually and insensibly risen around us.

When from the public scene we turn our eye to our own private connexions, the changes which have taken place in the *fashion of the world*, must touch every reflecting mind with a more tender sensibility. For where are now many of the companions of our early years; many of those with whom we first began the race of life; and whose hopes and prospects were once the same with our own? In recollecting our old acquaintance and friends, what devastations have been made by the hand of time? On the ruins of our former connexions, new ones have arisen; new relations have been formed; and the circle of those among whom we live, is altogether changed from what it once was. Comparing our present situation with our former condition of life; looking back to our father's house, and to the scenes of youth; remembering the friends by whom we were trained, and the family in which we grew up; who, but with inward emotion, recollects those days of former years, and is disposed to drop the silent tear, when he views *the fashion of the world* thus always *passing away*!

III. Not only our connexions with all things around us change, but our own life, through all its stages and conditions, is ever passing away. How just, and how affecting is that image, employed in the sacred writings to describe the state of man, *we spend our years as a tale that is told!** It is not to any thing great or lasting that human life is compared; not to a monument that is built, or to an inscription that is engraved; not even to a book that is written, or to a history that is recorded; but to a *tale*, which is listened to for a little; where the words are fugitive and passing, and where one incident succeeds and hangs on another, till, by insensible transitions, we are brought to the close; a *tale*, which in some passages may be amusing, in others, tedious; but, whether it amuses or fatigues, is soon told, and soon forgotten. Thus, year steals upon us after year. Life is never standing still for a moment; but continually, though insensibly, sliding into a new form. Infancy rises up fast to childhood; childhood to youth; youth passes quickly into manhood; and the grey hair and the faded look are not long of admonishing us, that old age is at hand. In this course, all generations run. The world is made up of unceasing rounds of transitory existence. Some generations are coming forward into being, and others hastening to leave it. The stream which carries us all along, is ever flowing with a quick current, though with a still and noiseless course. The dwell-

* Psalm xc. 9.

ing-place of man is continually emptying, and, by a fresh succession of inhabitants, continually filling anew. *The memory of man passeth away like the remembrance of a guest who hath tarried but one night.*

As the life of man, considered in its duration, thus fleets and passes away, so, during the time it lasts, its condition is perpetually changing. It affords us nothing on which we can set up our rest; no enjoyment or possession which we can properly call our own. When we have begun to be placed in such circumstances as we desired, and wish our lives to proceed in the same agreeable tenour, how often comes some unexpected event across, to disconcert all our schemes of happiness? Our health declines; our friends die; our families are scattered; something or other is not long of occurring, to show us that the wheel must turn round; *the fashion of the world must pass away.* Is there any man who dares to look to futurity with an eye of confident hope; and to say, that, against a year hence, he can promise being in the same condition of health or fortune as he is at present? The seeds of change are every-where sown in our state; and the very causes that seemed to promise us security, are often secretly undermining it. Great fame provokes the attacks of envy and reproach. High health gives occasion to intemperance and disease.* The elevation of the mighty never fails to render their condition tottering; and that obscurity which shelters the mean, exposes them, at the same time, to become the prey of oppression. So completely is the *fashion of this world* made by Providence for change, and prepared for *passing away.* In the midst of this instability, it were some comfort, did human prosperity decay as slowly as it rises. By slow degrees, and by many intervening steps, it rises. But one day is sufficient to scatter, and bring it to nought. I might add,

IV. THAT the world itself in which we dwell, the basis of all our present enjoyments, is itself contrived for change, and designed to pass away. While the generations of men come forth in their turns, like troops of succeeding pilgrims, to act their part on this globe, the globe on which they act is tottering under their feet. It was once overflowed by a deluge. It is shaken by earthquakes; it is undermined by subterraneous fires; it carries many a mark of having suffered violent convulsions, and of tending to dissolution. Revelation informs us, that there is a day approaching, in which *the heavens shall pass away with a great noise; the elements shall melt with fervent heat; and the earth and the works therein shall be burnt up.* When this destined hour arrives, the *fashion of the world* shall have finally *past away.* Immortal spirits shall then look back upon this world, as we do at present on cities and empires, which were once mighty and flourishing, but now are swept from existence, and their place is no more to be found.

I SHALL insist no longer on this representation of things. Enough has been said, to show that the *fashion of the world*, in every sense, *passes away.* Opinions and manners, public affairs and private concerns, the life of man, the conditions of fortune, and the earth itself on which we dwell, are all changing around us. — Is every thing, then, with which we are connected, passing and transitory? Is the whole

state of man no more than a dream or fleeting vision? Is he brought forth to be only the child of a day? Are we thrown into a river, where all flows, and nothing stays; where we have no means of resisting the current; nor can reach any firm ground, on which to rest our foot? — No, my brethren; man was not doomed to be so unhappy; nor made by his Creator so much in vain. There are three fixed and permanent objects, to which I must now call your attention, as the great supports of human constancy amidst this fugitive state. Though this world changes and passes away, virtue and goodness never change; God never changes; heaven and immortality pass not away.

First, VIRTUE and goodness never change. Let opinions and manners, conditions and situations, in public and in private life, alter as they will, virtue is ever the same. It rests on the immoveable basis of Eternal Truth. Among all the revolutions of human things, it maintains its ground; ever possessing the veneration and esteem of mankind, and conferring on the heart, which enjoys it, satisfaction and peace. Consult the most remote antiquity. Look to the most savage nations of the earth. How wild, and how fluctuating soever the ideas of men may have been, this opinion you will find to have always prevailed, that probity, truth, and beneficence, form the honour and the excellency of man. In this the philosopher and the savage, the warrior and the hermit, join. At this altar all have worshipped. Their offerings may have been unseenly. Their notions of virtue may have been rude, and occasionally tainted by ignorance and superstition; but the fundamental ideas of moral worth have ever remained the same.

Here then is one point of stability, affected by no vicissitudes of time and life, on which we may rest. Our fortunes may change, and our friends may die; but virtue may still be our own; and as long as this remains, we are never miserable. *Till I die I will not remove my integrity from me. My righteousness I hold fast, and will not let it go. My heart shall not reprove me so long as I live.** He who, with the holy man of old, can hold this language, may with undisturbed mind survey time flying away, life decaying, and the whole fashion of the world changing around him. He hath within himself a source of consolation and hope, independent of all earthly objects. Every terrestrial glory sparkles only for a little, with transient brightness. But virtue shines with eternal and unalterable splendour. It derives its origin from heaven; and partakes both of the lustre, and the stability, of celestial objects. *It is the brightness of the everlasting light; the unspotted mirror of God, and the image of his goodness.*

In the *second* place, God never changes. Amidst the unceasing vicissitude of earthly things, there remains at the head of the universe an eternal Protector of virtue, whose throne is established for ever. With him there is no variableness, neither any shadow of turning; no inconstancy of purpose, and no decay of wisdom or of power. We know that he loved righteousness from the beginning of days, and that he will continue to love it unalterably to the last. Foreseen by

* Job, xxvii. 5, 6.

him was every revolution which the course of ages has produced. All the changes which happen in the state of nature, or the life of men, were comprehended in his decree. How much soever worldly things may change in themselves, they are all united in his plan; they constitute one great system or whole, of which he is the Author; and which, at its final completion, shall appear to be perfect. His dominion holds together, in a continued chain, the successive variety of human events; gives stability to things that in themselves are fluctuating; gives constancy even to the *fashion of the world* while it is *passing away*. Wherefore, though all things change on earth, and we ourselves be involved in the general mutability, yet as long as, with trust and hope, we look up to the Supreme Being, we rest on the *rock of ages*, and are safe amidst every change. We possess a fortress to which we can have recourse in all dangers; a refuge under all storms; *a dwelling-place in all generations*.

IN the *third* and last place, Heaven and immortality pass not away. The fleeting scenes of this life are to be considered as no more than an introduction to a nobler and more permanent order of things, when man shall have attained the maturity of his being. This is what reason gave some ground to expect; what revelation has fully confirmed; and in confirming it, has agreed with the sentiments and anticipations of the good and wise in every age. We are taught to believe, that what we now behold, is only the first stage of the life of man. We are arrived no farther than the threshold; we dwell as in the outer courts of existence. Here, tents only are pitched; tabernacles erected for the sojourners of a day. But, in the region of eternity, all is great, stable, and unchanging. There, the *mansions* of the just are prepared; there, the *city which hath foundations* is built; there is established, the kingdom *which cannot be moved*. Here, every thing is in stir and fluctuation; because here good men continue not, but pass onward in the course of being. There, all is serene, steady, and orderly; because there remaineth the final *rest of the people of God*. Here, all is corrupted by our folly and guilt; and of course must be transient and vain. But there, purchased by the death, and secured by the resurrection, of the Son of God, is an *inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*. There reigns that tranquillity which is never troubled. There shines that sun which never sets. There flows that river of pleasures, which is always unruffled and pure. Looking forward to those divine habitations, the changes of the present world disappear to the eye of faith; and a good man becomes ashamed of suffering himself to be dejected by what is so soon to pass away.

SUCH are the objects you ought to oppose to the transient *fashion of the world*; Virtue, and God; and Heaven. Fixing your regard on these, you will have no reason to complain of the lot of man, or the world's mutability. — The design of the preceding representation which I gave of the world, was not to indulge vain declamation; to raise fruitless melancholy; or to throw an unnecessary cloud over human life: But to show the moderation requisite in our attachment to the world; and, at the same time, to point out the higher objects

both of attention and consolation which religion affords. — Passing and changeable as all human things are, among them, however, we must at present act our part; to them we must return from religious meditation. They are not below the regard of any Christian; for they form the scene which Providence has appointed at present for his activity, and his duty. Trials and dangers they may often present to him; but amidst these he will safely hold his course, if, when engaged in worldly affairs, he keep in view those divine objects which I have been setting before him. Let him ever retain connexion with Virtue, and God, and Heaven. By them let his conduct be regulated, and his constancy supported. So shall he *use this world without abusing it*. He shall neither droop under its misfortunes, nor be vainly elated by its advantages; but through all its changes shall carry an equal and steady mind; and in the end shall receive the accomplishment of the promise of Scripture, that though *the world passeth away, and the lust thereof, he that doeth the will of God shall abide for ever*. *

SERMON LXIII.

ON TRANQUILLITY OF MIND.

PSALM XV. 5.

— *He that doeth these things shall never be moved.*

TRANQUILLITY of mind, or, in the words of the Text, a mind *not moved* or disquieted by the accidents of life, is undoubtedly one of the greatest blessings that we can possess on earth. It is here mentioned as the reward of the man, whose character had been described in this psalm, as leading a virtuous life, and discharging his duty towards God and his neighbour. It is indeed the ultimate aim, to which the wishes of the wise and reflecting have ever been directed, that with a mind undisturbed by anxieties, cares, and fears, they might pass their days in a pleasing serenity. They justly concluded that, by enjoying themselves in peace, they would enjoy, to the greatest advantage, all the comforts of life that came within their reach.

This happy tranquillity, the multitude conceive to be most readily attainable by means of wealth, or, at least, of an easy fortune; which they imagine would set them above all the ordinary disturbances of life. That it has some effect for this purpose, cannot be denied. Poverty and straitened circumstances are often inconsistent with tranquillity. To be destitute of those conveniences that suit our rank in the world; to be burdened with anxiety about making provision for every day which passes over our head; instead of bringing comfort to a family who look up to us for aid, to behold ourselves surrounded with their wants and complaints, are circumstances which cannot fail to give much uneasiness to every feeling mind. To take

measures, therefore, for attaining a competent fortune, by laudable means, is wise and proper. Entire negligence of our affairs, and indifference about our worldly circumstances, is, for the most part, the consequence of some vice, or some folly. — At the same time, I must observe, that the attainment of opulence is no certain method of obtaining tranquillity. Embarrassments and vexations often attend it; and long experience has shown, that tranquillity is far from being always found among the rich. Nay, the higher that men rise in the world, the greater degrees of power, and distinction which they acquire, they are often the farther removed from internal peace. The world affords so many instances of miseries abounding in the higher ranks of life, that it were needless to enlarge on a topic so generally known and admitted.

Assuming it, therefore, for an undoubted truth, that the mere possession of the goods of fortune may be consistent with the want of inward tranquillity, we must look around for other more certain grounds of it. We must inquire whether any line of conduct can be pointed out, which, independent of external situation in the world, shall tend to make us easy in mind; shall either bestow, or aid, that tranquillity which all men desire. The remaining part of this Discourse shall be employed in suggesting, with great plainness of speech, such directions as appear to me most material on this important subject.

THE *first* direction which I have to suggest is, That we imitate the character of the man who is described in this Psalm as *walking uprightly, working righteousness, and speaking the truth, as he thinketh in his heart*; that we study to preserve a clear conscience, and to lead a virtuous and honourable, at least an inoffensive and innocent, life. Of such a man only it can be said, that, *doing these things, he shall never be moved*. So great is the power of conscience over every human being, that the remembrance of crimes never fails to overthrow tranquillity of mind. Be assured, that he who defrauds his neighbour, who has ensnared the innocent, has violated his trust, or betrayed his friend, shall never enjoy within himself undisturbed quiet. His evil deeds will at times recur to his thoughts, like ghosts rising up in black array before him to haunt his couch. Even the sense of a foolish and trifling conduct, of a life past in idleness and dissipation; by which, though a man has not been guilty of great crimes, he has, however, wasted his substance, mis-spent his time, and brought upon himself just reproach; even this, I say, is sufficient to create much uneasiness and disquiet to the heart. Let him, therefore, who wishes to enjoy tranquillity, study, above all things, to act an irreproachable part. With comfort he will rest his head on his pillow at night, when he is conscious that throughout the day he has been doing his duty towards God and man: when none of the transactions of that day come back, in painful remembrance, to upbraid him. To this testimony of a good conscience, let him be able,

In the *second* place, To join humble trust in the favour of God. As, after the best endeavours we can use, no man's behaviour will be entirely faultless, it is essential to peace of mind, that we have some

ground for hope in the divine mercy, that, through the merits of Jesus Christ, our defects shall be forgiven, and grace be shown us by Heaven. This includes all the duties of faith and repentance that are required by the Gospel; the faithful discharge of which duties is absolutely necessary for delivering us from those fears of another world, which, if not allayed, are sufficient to banish all tranquillity from the heart. Our religious principles must at the same time be sound and pure; and carefully preserved from the taint of superstition, whose gloomy horrors, taking possession of weak and ill-informed minds, convert what they mistake for religion, into a source of misery.—Moreover, it is necessary, that we be able to place trust in God, not only as our future Judge, but as the present Governour of human affairs. So uncertain is the continuance of every earthly comfort, that he who reposes no confidence in the Supreme Disposer of events, must be often disquieted and dejected. He alone possesses firm tranquillity, who, amidst all human vicissitudes, looks up, with settled trust, to an Almighty Ruler, as to one under whose conduct he is safe. To him alone belongs that happy privilege, described by the Psalmist: *He shall not be afraid of evil tidings; his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.**

I have pointed out the primary and essential foundations of tranquillity; virtuous conduct, good principles, and pious dispositions. At the same time, a man may be both pious and virtuous, and yet, through some defects in the management of his mind and temper, may not possess that happy serenity and self-enjoyment, which ought to be the portion of virtue and piety. Instances of this will occur to every one who is acquainted with the world. We too often behold persons, whose principles, and whose moral conduct, are in the main unexceptionable, leading an uncomfortable life; through fretfulness of temper, peevishness of manners, or sullenness of disposition. There is, therefore, some discipline to be studied; there are some subsidiary parts of character to be attended to, in order to give piety and virtue their full effect for conferring tranquillity. To the consideration of these secondary means I now proceed. Let me then advise you,

In the *third* place, To attend to the culture and improvement of your minds. A fund of useful knowledge, and a stock of ideas, afford much advantage for the enjoyment of tranquillity. I do not mean, that every man must study to become deeply learned. The situation of many would not allow it. The taste, and the habits of others, prevent it. But what I mean is, that every man who wishes to lead a comfortable life, should provide for himself, as much as he can, by means of observation, reading, and reflecting, a large field of useful thoughts. In a mind absolutely vacant, tranquillity is seldom found. The vacancy too often will be filled up by bad desires and
Whereas the mind of a wise man is a kingdom to itself. In solitary, or melancholy hours, he finds always resources within himself, to which he can turn for relief. As there are many occasions when external objects afford no pleasure, it is only by being able to

rest on the entertainments afforded to himself by his mind, that any one can pass his days with self-enjoyment. Let me recommend for the same purpose,

In the *fourth* place, That we be always careful to provide proper employment for our time. Regular industry and labour, with intervals of ease, is perhaps the state most conducive of any to tranquillity. If our station give no call to industry, it will be profitable that we study to have some end or object in view, to which our attention shall be directed. Relaxation from intense or incessant pursuit, is requisite for comfort. But if relaxation degenerate into total idleness, it becomes in a high degree adverse to tranquillity. Every man by his nature is formed, more or less, for action. In a mind that is entirely quiescent, and that has no object to put it into motion, instead of self-enjoyment, there will be constant languor, tediousness, and misery. Life stagnates in such a situation, like a pool of dead waters; and the man becomes a burden to himself. Violent and dangerous pursuits, which distract and embroil those who are engaged in them, I cannot be understood to recommend. Every one sees how foreign these are to a state of tranquillity. But, in the ordinary tenour of calm and easy life, I would advise every one to have some end before him; some object which shall bring the mind into action, and fill up the vacuities of time. Provided the object be innocent, and of no unsuitable or degrading nature, it may answer this purpose, though it should not be in itself of high importance. It is better for the mind to have some determinate direction given it, than to be always left floating, as it were, in empty space.—But about whatever objects we are employed, it is still more material to tranquillity, that, in the

Fifth place, We learn to govern our passions. These are the most frequent disturbers of our peace. Necessary as their impulse is to give activity to the mind, yet if they are not kept in subordination to reason, they speedily throw all things into confusion. Such of them as belong to the malignant and unsocial class, evidently tend to produce vexation and disquiet. Against suffering these to gain possession of the heart, admonition is scarcely necessary. But I must admonish you, that even those which are accounted of an innocent nature, and which therefore may lay hold of virtuous minds, if they obtain the entire mastery, are sufficient to overthrow the tranquillity of life. Let every one, therefore, who values that tranquillity, study to retain moderation and self-command, even in the midst of passions which have a fair and bland appearance. He will find that the gratification of any one of them, compensates not that perpetual slavery to which it will reduce him, when it becomes inordinate.

I have farther to admonish you, that this self-command is particularly necessary in all that relates to habitual temper. Even where strong passions are out of the question, those slight emotions which ruffle or sour the temper, are sufficient, by their frequent recurrence, to poison all self-enjoyment. He, who would possess a tranquil state, must, above all things, cultivate calmness and gentleness of disposition. He ought especially to cultivate it in that society, whether domestic or social, with which he has most frequent inter-

course. We all know, that there are thousands who in public, and in formal companies, affect to be all gentleness and sweetness, but who, at home, and among their nearest relations, give vent, with freedom, to the most rash and peevish dispositions. Such persons are not likely to enjoy much real comfort. For it is in the daily and familiar intercourse of life, that temper chiefly exerts its power, either for promoting or for disturbing the tranquillity of our days. On occasions when men come closest together, if, instead of meeting in smooth contact, they rub and grate on one another, the feelings produced on both sides are of the most offensive and displeasing kind. Nothing can be assumed as a more certain axiom, than that he who allows either inordinate passions, or a cross temper, to govern him, must, though he should possess all that flourishing fortune can bestow, be a stranger to tranquillity.

IN the sixth place, Let me advise you never to expect too much from the world. High hopes, and florid views, are great enemies to tranquillity. When rashly indulged, they are constantly producing disappointments. Their indulgence, in the mean time, occasions discontent with our present situation; and he who is discontented cannot be happy. One of the first lessons, both of religion and wisdom, is, to moderate our expectations and hopes; and not to bet forth on the voyage of life, like men who expect to be always carried forward with a favourable gale. Let your views be suited to your rank and station in the world; and never soar fantastically beyond them. Content yourselves with sober pleasures, and form your refresh to them. Be thankful when you are free from pain, though you be not in the midst of high enjoyment. Be satisfied, if the path you tread be easy and smooth, though it be not strewed with flowers. Human life admits not of continued pleasure; nor is it always rendered happy by great exaltation. Remember, that it is a middle region which is the native station of tranquillity. It neither aspires to those heights of the atmosphere where the thunder is formed, nor creeps always on the ground. Affect not, on every occasion, to put yourselves forward. Be content to retire sometimes into the shade; and allow others to take their proper place. — It will be easily seen, that I speak not now to the ambitious and aspiring; but to those who value tranquillity more than splendid appearance in the world.

Such persons I also advise, while they expect not too much from the world, neither, also, to form too high expectations from the characters of those on whose friendship they rest, and with whom it is their lot to be connected, either in social or domestic relations. If you have looked for perfection any where, you will find yourself disappointed; and the consequence of this disappointment will be, that friendship will cool, and disgust succeed. If you wish to enjoy comfort in any of your connexions, take your fellow-creatures as they are, and look for their imperfections to appear. You know you have your own; bear with those of others, as you expect that they are to bear with you. As no one is without his failings, few also are void of amiable qualities. Select for your companions, those who have the greatest share of such qualities; and value them accordingly.

— In a word, make the best of this world as you find it. Reckon both on the state of human life, and on the society of men, as mixed, and chequered with good and evil. Carrying always in your eye such views of things, you will be best formed to those equal spirits, and that reasonable disposition of mind, which make the basis of tranquillity. I shall only add, as my

Seventh, and last, advice on this subject, To mix retreat with the active business of the world, and to cultivate habits of serious thought and recollection. I before advised those who are not particularly engaged in active life, to form to themselves some object of pursuit, in order to furnish proper employment to time and thought. But the great multitude of men are in a different situation. Industry is required of them; business and cares press; and active pursuits occupy their closest attention. He who, in this situation, pours himself forth incessantly on the world, cannot escape partaking much of its disturbance and trouble. Amidst bustle, intrigue, and dissension, he must pass many an uneasy hour. Here an enemy encounters him; there, a rival meets him. A suspicious friend alarms him one hour; an ungrateful one provokes him the next. I do not recommend, that, for these reasons, he who studies tranquillity should retire from all public business, and forsake the haunts of men. This were the retreat of a monk, not of a good and a wise man. Tranquillity were too dearly purchased by the neglect of those duties which belong to a man, and a Christian. Nor indeed in absolute seclusion from the world is tranquillity ever found. On the contrary, when the human mind is cut off from those employments for which it was designed by nature and Providence, it preys on itself, and engenders its own misery. Tranquillity is always most likely to be attained, when the business of the world is tempered with thoughtful and serious retreat. *Commune with your hearts on your bed, and be still.* Leaving this world to itself, let there be seasons which you devote to yourselves, and to God. Reflection and meditation may the workings of many unquiet passions; and place us at a distance from the tumults of the world. When the mind has either been ruffled or cast down, an intercourse with God and heaven we find a sanctuary to which we can retreat. In the hours of contemplation and devotion, a good man enjoys himself in peace. He beholds nobler objects, than what worldly men can behold. He assumes a higher character. He listens to the voice of nature and of God; and from this holy sanctuary comes forth with a mind fortified against the little disturbances of the world. Such habits, therefore, cannot be too much recommended to the lovers of tranquillity, as powerful subsidiary means for attaining that happy state.

I HAVE thus pointed out what appears to me the discipline of religion and wisdom for tranquillity of mind. *He that doeth these things shall never be moved.* — During the early periods of life, vivid sensations of pleasure are the sole objects thought worthy of pursuit. Mere ease and calmness are despised, as the portion of the aged only, and the feeble. Some longer acquaintance with the world, with its disappointed hopes and fallacious pleasures, teaches almost all men,

by degrees, to wish for tranquillity and peace. But you must not imagine, that these are blessings which will drop on men of their own accord, as soon as they begin to desire them. No: the thoughtless and the prodigate will ever remain strangers to them. They will remain the sport of every accident that occurs to derange their minds, and to disturb their life. — The three great enemies to tranquillity are, Vice, Superstition, and Idleness: Vice, which poisons and disturbs the mind with bad passions; Superstition, which fills it with imaginary terrors; Idleness, which loads it with tediousness and disgust. It is only by following the path which eternal Wisdom has pointed out, that we can arrive at the blessed temple of Tranquillity, and obtain a station there: By doing, or at least endeavouring to do, our duty to God and man; by acquiring a humble trust in the mercy and favour of God through Jesus Christ; by cultivating our minds, and properly employing our time and thoughts; by governing our passions and our temper; by correcting all unreasonable expectations from the world, and from men; and, in the midst of worldly business, habituating ourselves to calm retreat and serious recollection. — By such means as these, it may be hoped, that, through the divine blessing, our days shall flow in a stream as unruffled as the human state admits. *The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest. But the work of righteousness is peace; and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever.**

SERMON LXIV.

ON THE MISFORTUNES OF MEN BEING CHARGEABLE ON THEMSELVES.

PROVERBS, xix. 3.

The foolishness of man perverteth his way, and his heart fretteth against the Lord.

How many complaints do we hear from every quarter, of the misery and distress that fill the world! In these the high and the low, the young and the aged, join; and, since the beginning of time, no topic has been more fertile of declamation than the vanity and vexation which man is appointed to suffer. But are we certain that this vexation, and this vanity, is altogether to be ascribed to the appointment of Heaven? Is there no ground to suspect, that man himself is the chief and immediate author of his own sufferings? What the Text plainly suggests is, that it is common for men to complain groundlessly of Providence; that they are prone to accuse God for the evils of life, when in reason they ought to accuse themselves; and that after their foolishness hath perverted their way, and made them undergo the consequences of their own misconduct, they impiously fret in heart against the Lord. This is the doctrine which I now purpose

* Isaiah, xxxii. 17.

to illustrate, in order to silence the sceptic, and to check a repining and irreligious spirit. I shall for this end make some observations, first, on the external, and next, upon the internal, condition of man; and then conclude with such serious and useful improvement as the subject will naturally suggest.

I. LET us consider the external condition of man. We find him placed in a world, where he has by no means the disposal of the events that happen. Calamities sometimes befall the worthiest, the best, which it is not in their power to prevent, and where nothing is left them, but to acknowledge and to submit to the high hand of Heaven. For such visitations of trial, many good and wise reasons can be assigned, which the present subject leads me not to discuss. But though those unavoidable calamities make a part, yet they make not the chief part, of the vexations and sorrows that distress human life. A multitude of evils beset us, for the source of which we must look to another quarter. — No sooner has any thing in the health, or in the circumstances of men, gone cross to their wish, than they begin to talk of the unequal distribution of the good things of this life; they envy the condition of others; they repine at their own lot, and fret against the Ruler of the world.

Full of these sentiments, one man pines under a broken constitution. But let us ask him, whether we can, fairly and honestly, assign no cause for this but the unknown decree of Heaven? Has he duly valued the blessing of health, and always observed the rules of virtue and sobriety? Has he been moderate in his life, and temperate in all his pleasures? If now he be only paying the price of his former, perhaps his forgotten, indulgences, has he any title to complain, as if he were suffering unjustly? Were you to survey the chambers of sickness and distress, you would find them peopled with the victims of intemperance and sensuality, and with the children of vicious indolence and sloth. Among the thousands who languish there, you would find the proportion of innocent sufferers to be small. You would see faded youth, premature old age, and the prospect of an untimely grave, to be the portion of multitudes who, in one way or other, have brought those evils on themselves; while yet these martyrs of vice and folly have the assurance to arraign the hard fate of man, and to fret against the Lord.

But you, perhaps, complain of hardships of another kind; of the injustice of the world; of the poverty which you suffer, and the discouragements under which you labour; of the crosses and disappointments of which your life has been doomed to be full. — Before you give too much scope to your discontent, let me desire you to reflect impartially upon your past train of life. Have not sloth, or pride, or ill-temper, or sinful passions, misled you often from the path of sound and wise conduct? Have you not been wanting to yourselves in improving those opportunities which Providence offered you, for bettering and advancing your state? If you have chosen to indulge your humour, or your taste, in the gratifications of indolence or pleasure, can you complain, because others, in preference to you, have obtained those advantages which naturally belong to

useful labours, and honourable pursuits? Have not the consequences of some false steps, into which your passions, or your pleasures, have betrayed you, pursued you through much of your life; tainted, perhaps, your character, involved you in embarrassments, or sunk you into neglect? — It is an old saying, that every man is the artificer of his own fortune in the world. It is certain, that the world seldom turns wholly against a man, unless through his own fault. *Godliness is, in general, profitable unto all things.* Virtue, diligence, and industry, joined with good temper and prudence, have ever been found the surest road to prosperity; and where men fail of attaining it, their want of success is far oftener owing to their having deviated from that road, than to their having encountered insuperable bars in it. Some, by being too artful, forfeit the reputation of probity. Some, by being too open, are accounted to fail in prudence. Others, by being fickle and changeable, are distrusted by all. — The case commonly is, that men seek to ascribe their disappointments to any cause, rather than to their own misconduct; and when they can devise no other cause, they lay them to the charge of Providence. Their folly leads them into vices; their vices into misfortunes; and in their misfortunes they *frat against the Lord*. They are doubly unjust towards God. In their prosperity, they are apt to ascribe their success to their own diligence, rather than to God's blessing; and in their adversity, they impute their distresses to his Providence, not to their own misbehaviour. Whereas, the truth is the very reverse of this. *Every good and every perfect gift cometh from above; and of evil and misery, man is the author to himself.*

When, from the condition of individuals, we look abroad to the public state of the world, we meet with more proofs of the truth of this assertion. We see great societies of men torn in pieces by intestine dissensions, tumults, and civil commotions. We see mighty armies going forth, in formidable array, against each other, to cover the earth with blood, and to fill the air with the cries of widows and orphans. Sad evils these are, to which this miserable world is exposed. — But are these evils, I beseech you, to be imputed to God? Was it he who sent forth slaughtering armies into the field, or who filled the peaceful city with massacres and blood? Are these miseries any other than the bitter fruit of men's violent and disorderly passions? Are they not clearly to be traced to the ambition and vices of princes, to the quarrels of the great, and to the turbulence of the people? — Let us lay them entirely out of the account, in thinking of Providence; and let us think only of the *foolishness of men*. Did man controul his passions, and form his conduct according to the dictates of wisdom, humanity, and virtue, the earth would no longer be desolated by cruelty; and human societies would live in order, harmony, and peace. In those scenes of mischief and violence which fill the world, let man behold, with shame, the pictures of his vices, his ignorance, and folly. Let him be humbled by the mortifying view of his own *perverseness*; but let *not his heart fret against the Lord*. — From the external condition, let us proceed,

II. To consider the internal state of man. It is certain, that much

disquiet and misery may be found there, although his outward condition appear undisturbed and easy. As far as this inward disquietude arises from the stings of conscience, and the horrors of guilt, there can be no doubt of its being self-created misery; which it is altogether impossible to impute to Heaven. But even, when great crimes, and deep remorse, are not the occasions of torment, how often is poison infused into the most flourishing conditions of fortune, by the follies and the passions of the prosperous? We see them peevish and restless; corrupted with luxury, and enervated by ease; impatient of the smallest disappointment; oppressed with low spirits, and complaining of every thing around them. How many *Hamans, Hazael's*, and *Herods*, are there in the world, who, from what they suffer within, pass their days in more vexation and misery, than they who undergo the hardships of poverty? Dare such men, in their most discontented moments, charge the Providence of Heaven with miseries of their own procuring? Providence had put into their hands the fairest opportunity of passing their life with comfort. But they themselves blasted every comfort that was offered; and verified the prediction, that *the prosperity of fools shall destroy them.**

As it is man's own *foolishness* which ruins his prosperity, we must not omit to remark, that it is the same cause which aggravates and embitters his adversity. That you suffer from the external afflictions of the world, may often be owing to God's appointment; but when, in the midst of these, you also suffer from the disorders of your mind and passions, this is owing to yourselves; and they are those inward disorders which add the severest sting to external afflictions. Many are the resources of a good and a wise man, under all the disasters of life. In the midst of them, it is always in his power to enjoy peace of mind, and hope in God. He may suffer; but under suffering he will not sink, as long as all is sound within. But when the spirit has been wounded by guilt and folly, its wounds open, and bleed afresh, upon every blow that is received from the world. The mind becomes sensible and sore to the slightest injuries of fortune, and a small reverse is felt as an insupportable calamity.

On the whole, the farther you search into human life, and the more you observe the manners and the conduct of men, you will be the more convinced of this great truth, that of the distresses which abound in the world, we are the chief authors. Among the multitudes who are, at this day, bewailing their condition and lot, it will be found to hold, of far the greater part, that they are reaping the *fruit of their own doings; their iniquities are reproving them, and their backslidings correcting them.* Unattainable objects foolishly pursued, intemperate passions nourished, vicious pleasures and desires indulged, God and God's holy laws forgotten; these, these are the great scourges of the world; the great causes of the life of man being so embroiled and unhappy. God hath ordained our state on earth to be a mixed and imperfect state. We have ourselves to blame for its becoming an insupportable one. If it bring forth nothing to us

* Prov. i. 32.

but vexation and vanity, we have sown the seeds of that vanity and vexation; and as we have sown, we must reap. — I now proceed to make improvement of those truths which we have been considering.

In the *first* place, Let us be taught to look upon sin as the source of all our miseries. It may sometimes assume the gentler names of folly, irregularity, or levity; but under whatever form it appears, it always imports a deviation from that sacred law which ought to regulate our conduct. It is still *the root that beareth gall and worm-wood**; and in exact proportion to the quantity of this poisonous weed, which we ourselves have infused into our cup, we must expect to drink the waters of bitterness. If the *foolishness of man* did not *pervert his ways*, his heart would have no occasion to *fret against the Lord*. He would enjoy competent satisfaction in every situation of life; and, under its unavoidable evils, would derive consolation from religion and virtue. — Indeed, of every evil which we now endure, of those evils which we look upon to be the appointment of Providence, as well as of others, sin is ultimately the cause; as it was man's revolt from God, which gave rise originally to those evils, and which rendered the chastisements we undergo, in this state of discipline, necessary, even for the *sons of God*. — But at present, we confine our observation to those miseries of which men are the immediate procurers to themselves; and from them alone, we find sufficient reason to consider sin as the capital foe to man; as the great troubler and disturber of his life. To Providence, then, let us look up with reverence. On sin let our indignation be vented; and, what is of more consequence, against sin and all its approaches, let our utmost caution be employed. As we proceed through the different paths of life, let us accustom ourselves to beware of sin, as the hidden snake lurking among the grass, from whose fatal touch we must fly in haste, if we would not experience its sting. — Too many have no just apprehensions of this danger. *Fools*, said the wise man, *make a mock at sin*. A fool indeed he must be, who dares to think lightly of it. He shows not only the depravity of his heart, but, what perhaps he will be more ashamed to be charged with, he shows his ignorance of the world. He shows that he knows not, he understands not, even his worldly interest, nor the interest and happiness of human society.

In the *second* place, Let us learn, from what has been set forth, one of the most awful and important of all truths, the reality of a Divine government exercised over the world. Blind must that man be who discerns not the most striking marks of it, in the doctrine which has been under our review. If there be a sceptic, who contends, that unrestrained liberty in the gratification of desire is given to man; that, in the sight of his Creator, all actions are equal; and that no rule of moral conduct hath been prescribed, or by any penalty enforced; in order to confute such a man, we have not recourse to reasonings, but simply appeal to plain and obvious facts. We bid him look only to the life of man; and take notice how every vice is,

* Deut. xxix. 18.

by the constitution of things, connected with misery. * We bid him trace the history of any one, with whose conduct he had particular occasion to be acquainted; and observe, whether the chief misfortunes which pursued him were not brought upon him by his own misbehaviour. We bid him remark in the history of nations, whether public virtue has not always exalted them; and whether licentiousness and crimes have not paved the way for their ruin. These are testimonies to the truth of religion, which cannot by any sophistry be evaded. This is a voice, which speaks its warnings loud and strong to every heart.

The system upon which the Divine government at present proceeds, plainly is, that men's *own wickedness* should be appointed to *correct them*; that sinners should *be snared in the work of their hands, and sunk in the pit which themselves had digged; that the backslider in heart should be filled with his own ways.*—Of all the plans which could have been devised for the government of the world, this approves itself to reason, as the wisest and most worthy of God; so to frame the constitution of things, that the Divine laws should in a manner execute themselves, and carry their sanctions in their own bosom. When the vices of men require punishment to be inflicted, the Almighty is at no loss for ministers of justice. A thousand instruments of vengeance are at his command; innumerable arrows are always in his quiver. But such is the profound wisdom of his plan, that no peculiar interposals of power are requisite. He has no occasion to step from his throne, and to interrupt the order of nature. With that majesty and solemnity which befits Omnipotence, He pronounces, *Ephraim is joined to his idols; let him alone.** He leaves transgressors to their own guilt, and punishment follows of course. Their sins do the work of justice. They lift the scourge; and with every stroke which they inflict on the criminal, they mix this severe admonition, that as he is only reaping the fruit of his own actions, he deserves all that he suffers.—From what has been said, I might take occasion,

In the *third* place, To show the injustice of our charging Providence with a promiscuous and unequal distribution of its favours among the good and the bad. That unequal distribution takes place in appearance only, not in reality. The whole conduct of Providence sufficiently marks, which of those classes of men it blesses and protects. The prosperity of sinners is no more than a deceitful show. The great materials of happiness are provided for the virtuous; and *evil never fails to pursue the wicked.* I shall close the Discourse with observing,

In the *fourth* and last place, The necessity which plainly arises from our present condition, of looking up to God for direction and aid in the conduct of life. The result of the whole doctrine I have now delivered is, that man's happiness or misery is, in a great measure, put into his own hands. In vain he complains of Providence. If *his heart fret against the Lord*, it is only because *his foolishness hath perverted his way*: for on himself, and his own behaviour, it depends,

* Hos. iv. 17.

to be free of those miseries which harass the wicked. — But, alas ! when we say, that this depends upon man, on what uncertain ground do we place his security ? Is man, when left to himself, equal to this high trust that is reposed in him, this important charge that is committed to him, of attaining happiness, by wise and unrepachable conduct ? Inconstant as he is in virtue, variable in his resolutions, soft and yielding in his nature to a thousand temptations ; how shall he guide himself through such slippery and dangerous paths as those of human life ; where many hidden precipices surround him ; many false lights lead him astray ; and where the consequence of every step he takes may be destruction and ruin ? — Thankful let us be to Heaven, that, in this situation, a merciful guide stretches out his hand to aid us ; that a celestial light shines upon us from above ; that a divine Spirit is promised to illuminate and strengthen us. Let us humbly request of Heaven, that this Spirit of the Almighty may ever be our guide ; never presumptuously trusting in our own wisdom, but listening attentively to the voice of God ; and *in all our ways acknowledging Him* who only can *direct our steps*. — Upon the whole, let us hold fast the persuasion of these fundamental truths ; — that, in all his dispensations, God is just and good ; that the cause of all the troubles we suffer is in ourselves, not in Him ; that virtue is the surest guide to a happy life ; that he who forsakes this guide, enters upon the path of death ; but that he who *walketh uprightly, walketh surely* ; and that he who *keepeth the commandment, keepeth his own soul*.

SERMON LXV.

ON INTEGRITY AS THE GUIDE OF LIFE.

PROV. xi. 3.

The integrity of the upright shall guide them. —

RIGHTEOUSNESS and sin are, in this book of Proverbs, frequently contrasted with each other, and the advantages of the former displayed. The righteous man is shown to be *more excellent than his neighbour, as the ways in which he walks are ways of pleasantness, while the way of transgressors is hard*. Honour is represented as attending the one, while shame is the portion of the other. The path of the one leads to life ; that of the other to destruction. In the Text, an advantage of righteousness is specified, which is not commonly attended to, and which some will not readily allow that it possesses. We are told by the wise man, that it affords light and direction to conduct, and will prove our best guide through all the intricacies of life. *The integrity of the upright shall guide them* ; or, as it is added, to the same purpose, in a following verse, *the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way*. There are many who will admit, that integrity is an amiable quality ; that it is entitled to much respect, and in most cases ought to influence our behaviour ; who nevertheless are unwilling to allow it the chief place in the direction of their worldly conduct.

They hold, that a certain artful sagacity, founded upon knowledge of the world, is the best conductor of every one who would be a successful adventurer in life; and that a strict attention to integrity, as his only guide, would often lead him into danger and distress. In opposition to tenets of this kind, I now purpose to show that, amidst all perplexities and dangers, there is no guide we can choose so safe, and so successful on the whole, as the integrity of an upright mind; and that, upon every trying occasion, principles of probity and honour will conduct a good man through life with more advantage, than if he were to act upon the most refined system of worldly wisdom.

It will not take much time to delineate the character of the man of integrity, as by its nature it is a plain one, and easily understood. He is one who makes it his constant rule to follow the road of duty, according as the word of God, and the voice of his conscience, point it out to him. He is not guided merely by affections, which may sometimes give the colour of virtue to a loose and unstable character. The upright man is guided by a fixed principle of mind, which determines him to esteem nothing but what is honourable, and to abhor whatever is base and unworthy in moral conduct. Hence you find him ever the same; at all times, the trusty friend, the affectionate relation, the conscientious man of business, the pious worshipper, the public-spirited citizen. He assumes no borrowed appearance. He seeks no mask to cover him; for he acts no studied part; but he is in truth what he appears to be, full of truth, candour, and humanity. In all his pursuits, he knows no path but the fair and direct one; and would much rather fail of success, than attain it by reproachful means. He never shows you a smiling countenance, while he meditates evil against you in his heart. He never praises you among your friends; and then joins in traducing you among your enemies. You will never find one part of his character at variance with another. In his manners, he is simple and unaffected; in all his proceedings, open and consistent.—Such is the man of integrity spoken of in the Text. Let us now proceed to show, in what manner, and with what effect, integrity serves for the guide of his life.

EVERY one who has begun to make any progress in the world, will be sensible, that to conduct himself in human affairs with wisdom and propriety, is often a matter of no small difficulty. Amidst that variety of characters, of jarring dispositions, and of interfering interests, which take place among those with whom we have intercourse, we are frequently at a stand as to the part most prudent for us to choose. Ignorant of what is passing in the breasts of those around us, we can form no more than doubtful conjectures concerning the events that are likely to happen. They may take some turn altogether different from the course in which we have imagined they were to run, and according to which we had formed our plans. The slightest incident often shoots out into important consequences, of which we were not aware. The labyrinth becomes so intricate, that the most sagacious can lay hold on no clue to guide him through it: He finds himself embarrassed, and at a loss how to act.—In public

and in private life, in managing our own concerns, and in directing those of others, the doubt started by the wise man frequently occurs; *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life?* While thus fatigued with conjecture, we remain perplexed and undetermined in our choice; we are at the same time pulled to different sides, by the various emotions which belong to our nature. On one hand, pleasure allures us to what is agreeable; on the other, interest weighs us down towards what seems gainful. Honour attracts us towards what is splendid; and indolence inclines us to what is easy. In the consultations which we hold with our own mind, concerning our conduct, how often are we thus divided within ourselves; puzzled by the uncertainty of future events, and distracted by the contest of different inclinations?

It is in such situations as these, that the principle of integrity interposes to give light and direction. While worldly men fluctuate in the midst of those perplexities which I have described, the virtuous man has one Oracle, to which he resorts in every dubious case, and whose decisions he holds to be infallible: He consults his conscience. He listens to the voice of God. Were it only on a few occasions that this Oracle could be consulted, its value would be less. But it is a mistake to imagine, that its Responses are seldom given. Hardly is there any material transaction whatever in human life, any important question that holds us in suspense as to practice, but the difference between right and wrong will show itself; and the principle of integrity will, if we listen to it impartially, give a clear decision. Whenever the mind is divided within itself, conscience is seldom or never neutral. There is always one side or other to which it leans. There is always one scale of the balance, into which it throws the weight of *some virtue, or some praise*; of something that is *just and true, lovely, honest, and of good report*. These are the forms, which rise to the observation of the upright man. By others they may be unseen, or overlooked; but, in his eye, the lustre of virtue outshines all other brightness. Wherever this pole-star directs him, he steadily holds his course.—Let the issue of that course be ever so uncertain; let his friends differ from him in opinion; let his enemies clamour; he is not moved; his purpose is fixed. He asks but one question of his heart, What is the most worthy and honourable part? what is the part most becoming the station which he possesses, the character which he wishes to bear, the expectations which good men entertain of him? Being once decided as to this, he hesitates no more. He shuts his ears against every solicitation. He pursues the direct line of integrity, without *turning either to the right hand or to the left*. “It is the Lord who calleth. Him I follow. Let him order what seemeth good in his sight.”—It is in this manner that the *integrity of the upright acts as their guide*.

BUT as, upon a superficial view, it may appear hazardous to place ourselves entirely under such a guide, let us now proceed to consider what can be said in defence of this plan of conduct, and what advantages serve to recommend it.

In the *first* place, I affirm, that the guidance of integrity is the

safest under which we can be placed; that the road in which it leads us is, upon the whole, the freest from dangers. Perfect immunity from danger is not to be expected in this life. We can choose no path, in which we may not meet with disappointments and misfortunes. Our life, at the best, is a pilgrimage, and perils surround it. Against these perils, the men of the world imagine that craft and dexterity furnish the best defence; and if, in any instance, they overreach the upright, they consider it as a manifest decision in favour of their plan. But, instead of resting on a few instances, let us take an extensive survey of the course of human affairs. Let us inquire who the persons are that, in all the different lines of life, have gone through the world with most success; and we shall find, that the men of probity and honour form by far the most considerable part of the list; we shall find that men of plain understanding, acting upon fair and direct views, have much oftener prospered, than men of the deepest policy, who were devoid of principle. How few are the instances of persons who, by fidelity, worth, and steadfast adherence to their duty, have either lost their fortunes, or incurred general displeasure, in times when human affairs were proceeding in their ordinary train? But how numerous and frequent are the examples of those whose prospects have been blasted, whose circumstances have been ruined, and their names sunk into contempt, by vice and dishonesty?

The man of the world aims at higher things, and more rapid success, than the man of moderation and virtue. But, at the same time, he incurs greater risks and dangers. No calculation of probabilities can insure safety to him who is acting a deceitful part. Amidst the unforeseen vicissitudes of the world, he has to dread not only disappointment to his plans, but the miseries also which detected fallacies may bring on his head. He walks on the edge of precipices, where a single false step may be fatal. He follows a wandering light, which, if it fail of guiding him by a short path to the palace of ambition, lands him in the pit, or the lake. Whereas he who follows the guidance of integrity, walks in the high road on which the light of the sun shines. He sees before him the habitation of peace to which his steps are directed; and if he be longer in arriving at it, he is sure of neither wandering far astray, nor of meeting on his road with any forms of unusual terror. — Let it be always remembered, that the principle of integrity which directs a good man, is far from excluding prudence in the conduct of life. It implies no improvident or thoughtless simplicity. On the contrary, it is closely connected with true wisdom. A man of enlarged capacity, and extensive views, is always upright. Craft is merely the supplement of inferior abilities. It characterises a narrow comprehension, and a little mind. — As the path of integrity is on the whole the safest path of conduct; so,

In the *second* place, It is unquestionably the most honourable. Integrity is the foundation of all that is high in character among mankind. Other qualities may add to its splendour; but, if this essential requisite be wanting, all their lustre fades. Were I drawing the character of one who claimed the admiration of the world; and

after I had ascribed to him eloquence, valour, and every endowment that is most shining and captivating, did I add, that he was a man of too much art to be trusted, I appeal to every one, whether, by this single stroke, the whole character would not be sunk and degraded? An interested and crafty man may perhaps rise into influence and high station; he may be a rich and a powerful, but will never be a great man. He may be feared, and externally honoured and courted; but in the secret thoughts of men he finds no respect. We all feel, that magnanimous sentiments cannot dwell in the same breast with selfishness and deceit.

He who rests upon an internal principle of virtue and honour, will act with a dignity and a boldness, of which they are incapable who are wholly guided by interest. He is above those timid suspicions, and cautious restraints, which fetter and embarrass their conduct. That firmness which the consciousness of rectitude inspires, gives vigour and force to his exertions on every great occasion. It adds double weight to all the abilities of which he is possessed. It even supplies the place of those abilities in which he is defective. They who oppose him are obliged to honour him. They look up to him with a secret awe, as to one who moves above them in a superior sphere; regardless of their good or ill opinion, of their promises or their threatenings: like one of those celestial luminaries which holds its course through its orbit, without being affected by any commotions among the elements below. Such a man is trusted, and relied upon, as well as esteemed, because all know where to find him, and upon what system he acts. He attaches friends and followers to himself, without courting them; and though his progress towards fame should be slow and interrupted at first by crooked arts, it is nevertheless certain and sure. The public may be misled for a while, in judging of real merit; but it is seldom unjust at the last. As persons continue to come forward to view, and to act their part in trying circumstances, their characters are at length fully ascertained; and, almost always, rated as they deserve. How corrupt soever the world may be, they cannot withhold approbation from him whose conduct is marked by uniform integrity and honour. Enemies he will have, but the public favours him; the multitude of men wish him success; and destine him, in their thoughts to every step of his preferment, before he arrives at it.

In the *third* place, The plan of conduct on which the man of integrity proceeds, is the most comfortable; that is, attended with the greatest satisfaction in a man's own mind. Amidst the various and perplexing events of life, it is of singular advantage to be kept free from doubt, as to the part most proper to be chosen. He who consults nothing but worldly interest, must, upon every turn of fortune, undergo much painful suspense. He is obliged to listen with anxious ear to every whisper of report; and, upon every new aspect which the face of affairs assumes, must study how to place himself in a new posture of defence. But the man of principle is a stranger to these inward troubles. His time is not lost, nor his temper fretted, by long and anxious consultations. One light always shines upon him from above. One path, the path of integrity, always opens clear

and distinct to his view. — But this is not his only advantage, to be freed from embarrassments, by having placed himself under the charge of one constant guide. He is also rewarded with the sense of having chosen his guide well and wisely. He is delivered from all inward upbraidings, from all misgivings of mind, from all alarms founded on the dread of discovery and disgrace. A good conscience enables him to look back on the part which he has acted, with satisfaction; and to look forward to the issue which it may bring, without concern. It is in the case of one issue only, that the man who acts from worldly interest can enjoy satisfaction; that is, when his designs have succeeded according to his wish. But it is the felicity of the man who acts under the direction of integrity, that, in every issue, he has something to comfort him. Though success has failed him, the consolation remains of having done his duty, and studied to approve himself to God.

This reference of all his actions to divine approbation, furnishes another source of satisfaction and peace. He looks up, with pleasing hope, to a protector in the heavens, who *loveth righteousness, and whose countenance becometh the upright*. The man of worldly wisdom is conscious of having no title to the favour of that high administration which rules the universe. By quitting the path of righteousness, he has left that straight road, in which God had appointed him to walk. He has taken the direction of his way to himself, and chosen to be his own guide and master. To his own abilities, therefore, such as they are, he must trust; and is become wholly responsible for the issue of his conduct. But the man of virtue hath *committed his way to the Lord*. He follows the divine signal. He co-operates with the divine purpose. The power which sways the universe is engaged on his side. By natural consequence, he has ground to expect, that any seeming disappointments which he may now incur, shall be overruled at the end to some salutary effect. Hence that *peace of God keeping the heart*, to which worldly men are strangers. Hence a degree of firmness and resolution in conduct, which it is impossible for them to possess. Especially when we add,

In the *fourth* and last place, That he who thus pursues a course of integrity, has always in his view the prospect of immortal rewards. That surely is the wisest direction of conduct, which is most amply recompensed at last. But what recompence can worldly wisdom bestow, comparable to what is promised by the Gospel to them who, *by patient continuance in well-doing, look for glory, honour, and immortality*? — The recompence indeed is distant, but the hope of it is present; and hope is one of the most powerful principles of human action. Let a man be firm in the belief that he is acting under the immediate protection of Heaven, and that through all eternity he shall be rewarded for what he now performs; and, as far as this belief is prevalent, his conduct will be steady and determined. Wherever religion directs him to hold his course, he will advance with intrepidity. He will submit to restraints without reluctance. He will meet dangers without fear. To every motive which reason suggests in favour of virtue, the hope of life eternal adds supernatural

strength.—Accordingly, in the behaviour of many holy men, under the most trying circumstances of distress, we behold this effect eminently exemplified. It appears, with much lustre, in the spirited and magnanimous sentiments of the Apostle Paul, when he had the prospect of death before him. *Behold, I go bound in the spirit to Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there; save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me; neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I may finish my course with joy.** — *I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that day.†*

THUS I have endeavoured to show in what manner the integrity of the upright guides them; and what the advantages are, of placing ourselves under its guidance. If it be the line of safety, or the line of honour, which we choose to pursue; if we consult our present comfort, or look forward to future rewards; in all these respects, the course which integrity points out is by far the most eligible.

It is a great recommendation of the guidance offered to us by integrity, that it is easily understood by all men. Plans of worldly policy are deep and intricate; and experience shows how often the ablest persons are mistaken in the measures which they adopt for carrying them on. But when men's intentions are fair and upright, it will be found, that a moderate share of understanding and attention is all that is requisite, for conducting themselves with safety and propriety. Providence never intended, that the art of living happily in this world should depend on that deep penetration, that acute sagacity, and those refinements of thought, which few possess. It has dealt more graciously with us; and made happiness to depend on uprightness of intention, much more than on extent of capacity. For the most part, the first sentiment which strikes a good man, concerning what he ought or ought not to do, is the soundest, and suggests the best and wisest counsel. When he hesitates, and begins to deliberate how far his duty, or his honour, can be reconciled to what seems his interest, he is on the point of deviating into a dangerous path.—At the same time, it is of great consequence, that he who seeks to surrender his conduct to the direction of integrity, should be well apprized of what true integrity requires. Let him guard against burdening conscience unnecessarily; lest a superstitious regard to trifles lead him to relax in matters of higher obligation. Let him avoid minute scrupulosity, on the one hand. Let him keep at a distance from loose casuistry, on the other. But when he is satisfied that his conscience has been well-informed, let him, without wavering, adhere to its dictates in the whole of his conduct. This will prove the truest wisdom both for this world and the next. For *he who walketh uprightly, walketh surely. The path of the just is as the shining light: And it shall shine more and more unto the perfect day.*

* Acts, xx. 22, 23, 24.

† 2 Tim. iv. 6, 7, 8.

SERMON LXVI.

ON SUBMISSION TO THE DIVINE WILL.

Job, ii. 10.

— *Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?*

FEW subjects of religious exhortation are of more general concern, than those which respect the distresses incident to human life. For no society, no family, no person, can expect to be long exempted from them; and when we speak of the prosperous, we can only mean those who are more rarely subject to them than others. Now, under those distresses, religion performs two offices: it teaches us how we ought to bear them; and it assists us in thus bearing them. Materials for both are found in the words of the Text, which contain a sentiment so natural and just, as to carry conviction to every reasonable mind. They were the words of Job, at a time when, to his other calamities, this domestic affliction was added, that one who ought to have assuaged and soothed his sorrows, provoked his indignation by an impious speech. *Thou speakest*, Job replies, *as one of the foolish women speaketh: What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* Three instructions naturally arise from the Text: First, That this life is a mixed state of good and evil: Secondly, That both the goods and the evils in it proceed from God: And, thirdly, That there are just reasons for our receiving with patience the evils of life, from the same hand which bestows its goods.

I. THIS life is a mixed state of good and evil. This is a matter of fact, which will be denied by none, and on which it is not necessary to bestow much illustration. It is evident to the slightest inspection, that nothing here is unallayed and pure. Every man's state is chequered with alternate griefs and joys, disappointment and success. No condition is altogether stable. No life preserves always the same tenour. The vicissitudes of the world sometimes bring forward the afflicted into more comfortable circumstances; and often trouble the joy of the prosperous. This is the train in which human affairs have ever been found to proceed; and in which we may expect them always to go on.

But though this be universally admitted in speculation, and often confessed in discourse, the misfortune is, that few think of applying it to their own case. The bulk of mankind discover as much confidence in prosperity, and as much impatience under the least reverse, as if Providence had first given them assurance that their prosperity was never to change, and afterwards had cheated their hopes. Whereas, what reason ought to teach us, is to adjust our mind to the mixed state in which we find ourselves placed; never to presume, never to despair; to be thankful for the goods which at present we enjoy, and to expect the evils that may succeed. — Thou hast been

admitted to partake of the feast of life. Its good things are distributed, in various portions, among the guests. Thou hast had thine allotted share. Complain not, when thy portion is removed. It is not permitted to any one, to remain always at the banquet.

II. We are taught by the Text, that both the goods and the evils which compose this mixed state, come from the hand of God. A little reflection may convince us, that, in God's world, neither good nor evil can happen by chance. If there were any one moment, in which God quitted the reins of the universe, and suffered any power to interfere with his administration, it is evident, that, from that moment, the measures of his government must become disjointed and incomplete. He who governs all things, must govern continually; and govern the least things as well as the greatest. *He never slumbers, nor sleeps.* There are no void spaces, no broken plans, in his administration; no blessings that drop upon us without his intention; nor any crosses that visit us, unsent by him. *I am the Lord, and there is none else. I form the light, and create darkness. I make peace, and create evil. I the Lord do all these things.**

How it has come to pass, that this life should contain such a mixture of goods and evils, and that the mixture too should be of God's appointment, gives rise to a difficult inquiry. For how can any thing but what is good proceed from the God of love? Can darkness issue from the source of light? or can it be any satisfaction to the *Father of mercies*, to behold the sorrows of creatures whom he has made? — Here there was room for much perplexity, till revelation informed us, that the mixture of evils in man's estate is owing to man himself. Had he continued as God originally made him, he would have received nothing but good from his Creator. His apostacy and corruption opened the gates of the tabernacle of darkness. Misery issued forth, and has ever since pursued him. In the present condition of his nature, that misery is partly punishment, partly trial. He is become incapable of bearing uninterrupted prosperity; and, by the mixture of evils in his lot, merciful designs are carried on for his improvement and restoration.

What the Text leads us at present to consider is, the effect that will follow from imitating the example of Job, and referring to the hand of the Almighty, the evils which we suffer, as well as the goods which we enjoy. Such a reference of the distressful events of our life to the appointment of Heaven, not only is a duty which piety requires, but tends also to mitigate distress, and to suggest consolation. For to dwell, as is too commonly done, upon the instruments and subordinate means of our trouble, is frequently the cause of much grief, and much sin. When we view our sufferings as proceeding merely from our fellow-creatures, the part which they have acted in bringing them upon us, is often more grating than the suffering itself. The unreasonableness, perhaps, of an enemy, the treachery of a friend, the ingratitude or insolence of one whom we had much obliged, add weight to a load laid upon us by means so provoking. The thoughts of their malignity, or of our own neglect in guarding against

* Isaiah, xlv. 6, 7.

it, serve to poison the sore. Whereas, if, instead of looking to men, we beheld the cross as coming from God, these aggravating circumstances would affect us less; we would feel no more than a proper burden; we would submit to it more patiently; and many resources would open to us, as shall in a little be shown, from thinking of the hand that lays it on. Had Job, when despoiled of all his substance, thought of nothing but the Chaldeans and Sabeans, who robbed him, with what violent passions would he have been transported, and with what eager desires of revenge tormented? Whereas, considering them as rods and instruments only in the divine hand, and receiving the correction as from the Almighty himself, the tumult of his mind subsided; and with respectful composure he could say, *The Lord gave; and the Lord hath taken away: Blessed be the name of the Lord!* This leads me,

III. To consider the last, and most important instruction, arising from the Text; namely, that there are many reasons why we, who receive good from the hand of God, should receive with patience the evils which he is pleased to inflict. This is strongly conveyed by that interrogatory form of speech, in which the sentiment of Job is expressed: *What! shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* In order to unfold all that is contained in this appeal made to every man's conscience, let us consider,

In the *first* place, That the good things which God has bestowed, afford sufficient evidence for our believing, that the evils which he sends, are not causelessly or wantonly inflicted. Did we live in a world which bore the marks of a malicious or cruel governour, there might be reason for distrusting every step of his conduct. But in the world which we inhabit, we behold, on the contrary, plain marks of predominant goodness. We behold the structure of the universe, the order of nature, the general course of Providence, obviously arranged with a benevolent regard to the welfare of men. All the art and contrivance of which the divine works are full, point to this end; and the more they are explored, create the firmer belief, that the goodness of the Deity gave rise to the system of creation. What is the conclusion to be thence drawn, but that, in such parts of the divine administration as appear to us harsh and severe, the same goodness continues to preside, though exercised in a hidden and mysterious manner?

Let me desire you to consider, whether, if some powerful friend had placed you in an opulent and comfortable station, and, in the general conduct of your affairs, had discovered the most disinterested kindness, you would not ascribe any occasional discouragements you received to some unknown reason or cause, rather than to his unfaithfulness or cruelty? Ought not the experience which we have had, and the discovery which all nature affords, of the divine goodness, to lead us to put a like construction on the evils which we suffer from a hand that hath so frequently loaded us with good?—Have we forgotten, in the midst of our complaints, who brought us into the light of day; who watched over our helpless infancy; who reared our growing childhood; and, through ten thou-

sand surrounding dangers, has been our protector and guardian until this day? How often has he rescued us from sickness and death, and made our hearts glad with unexpected comforts? Now, that some cloud is thrown over our prosperity, or some blessing withdrawn, in which for a time we had rejoiced, can we imagine that there is no good cause for this change of his proceeding? Shall we suspect that his nature is entirely altered? *Hath God forgotten to be gracious? Hath he in anger shut up his tender mercies?* No; let us say with the Psalmist, *This is my infirmity; but I will remember the works of the Lord. I will remember the years of the right hand of the Most High.** — One signal work of the Most High, at least, let us remember, and rejoice in the remembrance of it; even that final remedy which he has provided for all the evils occasioned by sin, in the redemption of the world accomplished by Jesus Christ. *He who spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all,* will he, in any case, wantonly afflict the children of men with superfluous and unnecessary sorrows? Is not this a proof so satisfactory, so express and demonstrative, of the gracious purposes of God, as should dispose us to take in good part every thing which proceeds from him? Consider,

In the *second* place, That the good things we receive from God are undeserved, the evils we suffer are justly merited. Every reasonable person must feel the weight of this consideration, for producing patience and submission. For, though to suffer at any rate be grievous, yet to suffer unjustly is doubly galling. Whereas, when one receives a mixed portion, whereof the goods are above his deserts, and the evils below his deserts, to complain, in such a case, is unreasonable; there is more ground for being thankful. All, it is true, have not deserved evil equally. Yet all of us deserve it more or less; and to merit good at the hand of the Lord, is what none of us can pretend. At the best, we are but *unprofitable servants*. Even this is more than we are entitled to claim. For if God were to *enter into judgment* with us, who could stand before him? who could justify himself in his sight? When the most inoffensive compare their conduct with God's holy law; when they reflect upon the duties they have omitted, and the actual guilt they have contracted, they will find more reason to accuse themselves, than to complain of the divine chastisement. Whatever innocence any of us may plead, nay, whatever merit we may claim, with respect to men and the world, we suffer no more than what we deserve from the Governour of the world: and of his displeasure, we know that the wrath of man is no other than the instrument.

Not only all of us have done evil, but, what ought to be particularly attended to, God has a just title to punish us for it. Although a man know that he deserves punishment, yet he will not allow every one to inflict it. A child will submit to his parents, a servant to his master, a subject to the magistrate, when he would not bear correction from another hand. But no parent can have so complete a right to authority over his children, no master over his servants, no ma-

* Psalm lxxvii. 9, 10.

gistrate over his subjects, as the Almighty hath ^{us} over us. When we were born, we brought nothing with us into God's world. During our continuance in it, we have lived on the good things which God has pleased to lend us; and of which, God and our own conscience know that we have made but a sorry improvement. When he thinks proper to take any of them away, no wrong is done us; for they were not ours. To have enjoyed them so long, was a favour. To enjoy them always, was what we neither deserved, nor had any title to expect.

In the *third* place, The good things which at different times we have received and enjoyed, are much greater than the evils which we suffer. Of this fact, I am sensible it will be difficult to persuade the afflicted. But would they weigh, in a fair balance, the whole of their circumstances, they would find it true. Whatever persons feel at the present, makes so strong an impression upon them, as very commonly to obliterate the memory of all the past. When one is impressed with some painful disease in his body, or wrung with some sore distress of mind, every former comfort, at that moment, goes for nothing. Life is beheld in all its gloom. A dark cloud seems to hang over it; and it is reviled, as no other than a scene of wretchedness and sorrow. But this is to be unjust to human life, as well as ungrateful to its Author. — Let me only desire you to think how many days, how many months, how many years, you have passed in health, and ease, and comfort; how many pleasurable feelings you have had; how many friends you have enjoyed; how many blessings, in short, of different kinds you have tasted; and you will be forced to acknowledge, that more materials of thanksgiving present themselves, than of lamentation and complaint. — These blessings, you will say, are past. But though past, ought they to be gone from your remembrance? Do they merit no place, in the comparative estimate of the goods and evils of your state? Did you, could you expect, that, in this mutable world, any temporal joy was to last for ever? Has gratitude no influence to form your minds to a calm acquiescence in your benefactor's appointments? What can be more reasonable than to say, "Having in former times received so many good things from the hand of God, shall I not now, without murmuring, receive the few evils which it pleases him to send."

In the *fourth* place, Not only the goods of life are, upon the whole, greater than its evils; but the evils which we suffer are seldom, or never, without some mixture of good. As there is no condition on earth of pure unmixed felicity, so there is none so miserable, as to be destitute of every comfort. Entire and complete misery, if ever it take place, is of our own procuring, not of God's sending. None but the most gross and atrocious sinners can be in such a situation, as to discover no ray of relief or hope. In the ordinary distresses of life, it is generally our own folly and infirmity which, upon the loss of some one blessing that we had highly prized, deprives us of satisfaction in all other things. Many of our calamities are purely imaginary, and self-created; arising from rivalry or competition with

others, and from false opinions of the importance of objects, to which custom and fashion have annexed an ideal value. Were these mistaken opinions once corrected by reason, the evil would disappear, and contentment would resume its place. With respect to those calamities which are inflicted by God, his Providence has made this wise and merciful constitution, that, after the first shock, the burden by degrees is lightened. Time brings a gentle and powerful opiate to all misfortunes. What is very violent, cannot last long; and what lasts long, we become accustomed to bear. Every situation that is permanent, at length is felt to be tolerable. The mind accommodates itself to it; and by degrees regains its usual tranquillity. Hence the greatest part of the evils of life are more terrible in the previous apprehension, than in the actual feeling; and it seldom happens but, in one corner or other, something is found on which the mind can lay hold for its relief.

How many, for instance, do we behold around us, straitened in their worldly circumstances, and yet finding the means to live cheerfully, with poverty and peace in the same habitation? If we are deprived of friends whom we tenderly loved, are there not still some remaining, from whom we may expect much comfort? If our bodies are afflicted with sore disease, have we not reason to be thankful that our mind continues vigorous and entire; that we are in a situation to look around us for whatever can afford us ease; and that, after the decay of this frail and mouldering tabernacle, we can look forward to a *house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*? — In the midst of all distresses, there remains to every sincere Christian, that mixture of pure and genuine consolation, which springs from the promises and hopes of the Gospel. Consider, I beseech you, what a singularly happy distinction this makes in your situation, beyond the state of those who, under the various troubles of life, are left *without hope, and without God in the world*; without any thing to look to, but a train of unknown causes and accidents, in which they see no light nor comfort. — Think the Father of mercies, that into all the evils he sends he infuses this joyful hope, that *the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that shall be revealed* in the end, to the virtuous and good.

In the *fifth* and last place, As the evils which we suffer are thus alleviated by a mixture of good; so we have reason to believe, that the evils themselves are, in many respects, good. When borne with patience and dignity, they improve and ennoble our character. They bring into exercise several of the manly and heroic virtues; and, by the constancy and fidelity with which we support our trials on earth, prepare us for the highest rewards in heaven. — It has always been found, that the present constitution of human nature cannot bear uninterrupted prosperity, without being corrupted by it. The poisonous weeds which spring up in that too luxuriant soil, require the hand of adversity to extirpate them. It is the experience of sorrow and distress that subdues the arrogance of pride, tames the violence of passion, softens the hardness of the selfish heart, and humanizes the temper to feel for the woes of others. Many have had reason to

say, that it was good for them to be afflicted. ~~When~~ *When men take the timbrel and the harp, and rejoice at the sound of the organ, they are apt to say unto God, Depart from us, for we desire not the knowledge of thy ways. What is the Almighty that we should serve him? But when they are holden in cords of affliction, then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity.*† Is his case to be deplored as highly calamitous, who, by forfeiting some transient enjoyments of the world, purchases lasting improvement in piety and virtue, and exchanges a few of the good things of this life for the better things of another?

INFLUENCED by such considerations as these, let us look up with reverence to the great Disposer of events; and, under any distress with which he is pleased to visit us, let us utter no other voice but this; *Shall we receive good at the hand of God, and shall we not receive evil?* — Men are too often ingenious in making themselves miserable, by aggravating to their own fancy, beyond bounds, all the evils which they endure. They compare themselves with none but those whom they imagine to be more happy; and complain that upon them alone has fallen the whole load of human sorrows. Would they look with a more impartial eye on the world, they would see themselves surrounded with sufferers; and find that they are only drinking out of that mixed cup which Providence has prepared for all. “I will restore your daughter again to life,” said the Eastern sage, to a prince who grieved immoderately for the loss of a beloved child, “provided, you are able to engrave on her tomb the names of three persons who have never mourned.” The prince made inquiry after such persons; but found the inquiry vain, and was silent. — To every reasonable person, who retains the belief of religious principles, many alleviating circumstances, and many arguments for patience, will occur under every distress. If we rest on this firm persuasion, that there is a wise and just Providence which disposes of all events, we shall have reason to conclude, that nothing happens to us here without some good design. Trusting that a happy termination shall at last arrive to the disorders of our present state, we shall be enabled, amidst all the varieties of fortune, to preserve that equanimity which befits Christians; and under every trial to say, *It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth good in his sight.*

SERMON LXVII.

ON FRIENDSHIP.

PROV. xxvii. 10.

Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not. —

WHATEVER relates to the behaviour of men in their social character is of great importance in religion. The duties which spring from

† Psalm cxix. 71.

† Job. xli. 25, 26, 27. — xxxvi. 8—10.

that character form many branches of the great law of charity, which is the favourite precept of Christianity. They, therefore, who would separate such duties from a religious spirit, or who at most treat them as only the inferior parts of it, do a real injury to religion. They are mistaken friends of piety, who, under the notion of exalting it, place it in a sort of insulated corner, disjoined from the ordinary affairs of the world, and the connexions of men with one another. On the contrary, true piety influences them all. It acts as a vivifying spirit, which animates and enlivens, which rectifies and conducts them. It is no less friendly to men than zealous for the honour of God; and by the generous affections which it nourishes, and the beneficent influence which it exerts on the whole of conduct, is fully vindicated from every reproach which the infidel would throw upon it. — In this view, I am now to discourse on the nature and duties of virtuous friendship, as closely connected with the true spirit of religion. It is a subject which the inspired philosopher, who is the author of this book of Proverbs, has thought worthy of his repeated notice; and in many passages has bestowed the highest eulogiums on friendship among good men. *As ointment and perfume rejoice the heart, so doth the sweetness of a man's friend by hearty counsel. As iron sharpeneth iron, so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend. Make sure of thy friend; for faithful are the wounds of a friend. A friend loveth at all times; and a brother is torn for adversity. There is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother. — Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, it is said in the Text, forsake not.*

I must begin the subject, by observing, that there are among mankind friendships of different kinds; or, at least, connexions which assume that name. When they are no more than confederacies of bad men, they ought to be called conspiracies, rather than friendships. Some bond of common interest, some league against the innocent and unsuspecting, may have united them for a time. But they are held together only by a rope of sand. At bottom they are all rivals, and hostile to one another. Their friendship can subsist no longer than interest cements them. Every one looks with a jealous eye on his supposed friend; and watches the first favourable opportunity to desert, or to betray.

Friendships too there are of a different kind, and of a more respectable nature, formed by the connexion of political parties. It is not, perhaps, on selfish or crooked designs that such friendships are originally founded. Men have been associated together by some public interest, or general cause, or for defence against some real or imagined danger; and connexions thus formed, often draw men into close union, and inspire for a season no small degree of cordial attachment. When upon just and honourable principles this union is founded, it has proved, on various occasions, favourable to the cause of liberty and good order among mankind. At the same time, nothing is more ready to be abused than the name of public spirit, and a public cause. It is a name under which private interest is often sheltered, and selfish designs are carried on. The unwary are

allured by a specious appearance; and the heat of faction usurps the place of the generous warmth of friendship.

It is not of such friendships, whether of the laudable or the suspicious kind, that I am now to discourse; but of private friendships, which grow neither out of interested designs, nor party zeal; but which flow from that similarity of dispositions, that corresponding harmony of minds, which endears some person to our heart, and makes us take as much part in his circumstances, fortunes, and fate, as if they were our own. *The soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David; and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.** Such friendships certainly are not unreal; and, for the honour of human nature, it is to be hoped, are not altogether unfrequent among mankind. — Happy it is, when they take root in our early years; and are engrafted on the ingenuous sensibility of youth. Friendships then contracted retain to the last a tenderness and warmth, seldom possessed by friendships that are formed in the riper periods of life. The remembrance of ancient and youthful connexions melts every human heart; and the dissolution of them is, perhaps, the most painful feeling to which we are exposed here below. — But at whatever period of life friendships are formed, as long as they continue sincere and affectionate, they form, undoubtedly, one of the greatest blessings we can enjoy. By the pleasing communications of all our sentiments which they prompt, they are justly said to double our pleasures, and to divide our sorrows. They give a brighter sunshine to the gay incidents of life; and they enlighten the gloom of its darker hours. *A faithful friend, it is justly and beautifully said, by one of the Apocryphal writers, is the medicine of life.* † A variety of occasions happen, when to pour forth the heart to one whom we love and trust, is the chief comfort, perhaps the only relief, we can enjoy. Miserable is he who, shut up within the narrow inclosure of selfish interest, has no person to whom he can at all times, with full confidence, expand his soul.

SINCE cordial friendship is so great a blessing to human life, let us proceed to consider what duties it requires, and by what methods it may be cultivated to most advantage. The fundamental qualities of true friendship are, constancy and fidelity. Without these material ingredients, it is of no value. An inconstant man is not capable of friendship. He may perhaps have affections which occasionally glow in his heart; which excite fondness for amiable qualities; or connect him with seeming attachment to one whom he esteems, or to whom he has been obliged. But after these feelings have lasted for a little, either fancied interest alienates him, or some new object attracts him; and he is no longer the same person to those whom he once loved. A man of this inconstant mind cannot be said to have any mind at all. For where there is no fixedness of moral principle, occasional feelings are of no value; mind is of no effect; and with such persons it is never desirable to have any connexion. Where constancy is wanting, there can be no fidelity, which is the other basis of friendship. For all friendship supposes entire confidence and trust; sup-

* 1 Sam. xviii. 1.

† Eccus. vi. 16.

poses the seal of secrecy to be inviolable; supposes promises and engagements to be sacred; and no advantage of our own to be pursued, at the expence of our friend's honour. An inconstant man is despicable. A faithless man is base.

But, supposing neither constancy nor fidelity to be altogether wanting, still however friendship is in hazard of suffering from the follies, and unreasonable humours, to which all of us are liable. It is to be regarded as a tender plant in an unfavourable soil, which, in order to its flourishing, requires to be reared and nursed with care. The following directions may be of use for promoting its cultivation, and preserving it from whatever might be apt to blast and wither it.

In the *first* place, Let me advise you not to expect perfection in any with whom you contract friendship. It holds in general with respect to all worldly pursuits, that the more moderate our expectations are, they are likely to be the more successful. If, in any situation of life, we hope to possess complete happiness, we may depend on receiving mortifications. If, in any person, we trust to find nothing but perfection, we may be assured that, on longer acquaintance, we shall meet with disappointments. In the case of friendship, this admonition is the more necessary to be given, as a certain warmth and enthusiasm belong to it, which are apt to carry us beyond the bounds of nature. In young minds, especially, a disposition of this kind is often found to take place. They form to themselves romantic ideas, gathered perhaps from fictitious histories, of the high and heroic qualities which belong to human nature. All those qualities they ascribe, without reserve or limitation, to the person with whom they wish to enter into intimate friendship; and, on the least failure appearing, alienation instantly follows. Hence many a friendship, hastily perhaps contracted, is as hastily dissolved, and disgust succeeds to violent attachment.—Remember, my friends, that a faultless character on earth is a mere chimera. Many failings you experience in yourselves. Be not surprised, when you discover the like in others of whom you had formed the highest opinion. The best and most estimable persons are they in whom the fewest material defects are found; and whose great and solid qualities counterbalance the common infirmities of men. It is to these qualities you are to look in forming friendships; to good sense and prudence, which constitute the basis of every respectable character; to virtue, to good temper, to steadiness of affection; and, according to the union of those dispositions, esteem yourselves happy in the friend whom you choose.

In the *second* place, I must admonish you not to be hurt by differences of opinion arising in intercourse with your friends. It is impossible for these not to occur. Perhaps no two persons were ever cast so exactly in the same mould, as to think always in the same manner on every subject. It was wisely contrived by Providence, that diversity of sentiment should take place among men, on purpose to exercise our faculties, and to give variety to human life. Perpetual uniformity of thought would become monotonous and insipid.—When it is with regard to trifles that diversity or contrariety of opinions shows itself, it is childish in the last degree, if this become the ground of estranged

affection. When from such a cause there arises any breach of friendship, human weakness is then discovered in a mortifying light. In matters of serious moment, the sentiments of the best and worthiest may vary from those of their friends, according as their lines of life diverge, or as their temper and habits of thought present objects under different points of view. But, among candid and liberal minds, unity of affection will still be preserved. No man has any title to erect his own opinions into an universal and infallible standard: And the more enlarged that any man's mind is, the more readily will he overlook difference in sentiments, as long as he is persuaded that the mind of his friend is upright, and that he follows the dictates of conscience and integrity.

In the *third* place, It is material to the preservation of friendship, that openness of temper and manners, on both hands, be cultivated. Nothing more certainly dissolves friendship, than the jealousy which arises from darkness and concealment. If your situation oblige you to take a different side from your friend, do it openly. Avow your conduct; avow your motives; as far as honour allows, disclose yourselves frankly; seek no cover from unnecessary and mysterious secrecy. Mutual confidence is the soul of friendship. As soon as that is destroyed, or even impaired, it is only a show of friendship that remains. What was once cordial intimacy, degenerates first into formal civility. Constraint on both sides next succeeds; and disgust or hatred soon follows. — The maxim that has been laid down by certain crooked politicians, to behave to a friend with the same guarded caution as we would do to an enemy, because it is possible that he may one day become such, discovers a mind which never was made for the enjoyments of friendship. It is a maxim which, not unreasonably I admit, may find place in those political and party friendships, of which I before spoke, where personal advancement is always in view. But it is altogether inconsistent with the spirit of those friendships which are formed, and understood to be nourished, by the heart.

The *fourth* advice which I give is, To cultivate, in all intercourse among friends, gentle and obliging manners. It is a common error to suppose, that familiar intimacy supersedes attention to the lesser duties of behaviour; and that, under the notion of freedom, it may excuse a careless, or even a rough demeanour. On the contrary, an intimate connexion can only be kept up by a constant wish to be pleasing and agreeable. The nearer and closer that men are brought together, the more frequent that the points of contact between them become, there is the greater necessity for the surface being smooth, and every thing being removed that can grate or offend. — Let no harshness, no appearance of neglect, no supercilious affectation of superiority, occur in the intercourse of friends. A tart reply, a proneness to rebuke, a captious and contradictory spirit, are often known to embitter domestic life, and to set friends at variance. In those smaller articles of behaviour, where men are too apt to be careless, and to indulge their humour without restraint, the real character is often understood to break forth, and show itself. It is by no means enough, that in all matters of serious interest, we think

ourselves ready to prove the sincerity of our friendship. These occur more rarely. The ordinary tenour of life is composed of small duties and offices, which men have occasion daily to perform; and it is only by rendering daily behaviour agreeable, that we can long preserve the comforts of friendship.

In the *fifth* place, Let me caution you not to listen rashly to evil reports against your friends. When upon proper grounds you have formed a connexion, be slow of believing any thing against the friend whom you have chosen. Remember, that there is among mankind a spirit of malignity, which too often takes pleasure in disturbing the society of those who appear to enjoy one another. The Scripture hath warned us, that there is a *whisperer who separateth chief friends; there is a false witness who soweth discord among brethren*. Give not therefore a ready ear to the officious insinuations of those who, under the guise of friendly concern, come to admonish you, that you ought to stand on your guard against those whom they see you disposed to trust. Consider, whether, under this fair appearance, there may not lurk some secret envy and rivalry, or some concealed interest. Chase not every flying report. Suffer not the poison of jealousy easily to taint your mind, and break your peace. A wide difference there is between that weak credulity which allows itself to be imposed upon blindly, and that dark and suspicious spirit which is always inclined to the evil side. It forms part of the character of a wise and good man, that he is not prone to *take up a reproach against his neighbour*.

In the *sixth* and last place, Let me exhort you not to desert your friend in danger or distress. Too many there are in the world, whose attachment to those they call their friends is confined to the day of their prosperity. As long as that continues, they are, or appear to be, affectionate and cordial. But as soon as their friend is under a cloud, they begin to withdraw, and to separate their interests from his. In friendships of this sort, the heart, assuredly, has never had much concern. For the great test of true friendship, is constancy in the hour of danger, adherence in the season of distress. — When your friend is calumniated, then is the time, openly and boldly to espouse his cause. When his situation is changed, or his fortunes are falling, then is the time, affording prompt and zealous aid. When sickness or infirmity occasion him to be neglected by others, that is the opportunity which every real friend will seize, of redoubling all the affectionate attentions which love suggests. These are the important duties, the sacred claims of friendship, which religion and virtue enforce on every worthy mind. — To show yourselves warm, after this manner, in the cause of your friend, commands esteem, even from those who have personal interest in opposing him. This honourable zeal of friendship has, in every age, attracted the veneration of mankind. It has consecrated to the latest posterity the names of those who have given up their fortunes, and have even exposed their lives, in behalf of the friends whom they loved; while ignominy and disgrace have ever been the portion of them, who deserted their friends in the evil day. *Thine own friend forsake not.*

BEFORE concluding, it must not be forgotten, that the injunction of the Wise Man in the Text is accompanied with this remarkable expression; not only *thine own friend*, but also, *thy father's friend, forsake not*. These words bring back to our remembrance the days of former years; and suggest a sentiment, which cannot but touch every feeling heart. Thine own friend may be dear; thy father's friend ought to be sacred. As long as life remains in any human breast, the memory of those ancient ties should remain, which connected us once with our father, and our father's house. Thy father has perhaps, long ago, gone down to the dust. But when you recal the innocent days of childhood and youth; when you think of those family transactions, which once gladdened your hearts; your father's friend, in the midst of these, will rise to your remembrance. There was a time when you accosted him with respect, or looked up to him with fondness, and was made happy by his kindly notice. Does such a one now survive, and shall he not receive from you some portion of filial reverence and honour? To disregard and neglect him, is to spurn your father's memory; is to insult the ashes of him who now sleeps in the grave; is to transmit yourselves to those who shall succeed you, as unfeeling and base. *Thine own friend, and thy father's friend, forsake not*.

I HAVE pointed out some of the chief duties which belong to virtuous friendship; and some of the principal means by which this sacred bond should be preserved unbroken; this holy flame should be kept alive, in the human breast. The spirit, and sentiments, which I have studied to inspire, are such as virtue breathes, and such as true piety should increase. It is thus we fulfil that great law of love, which our Divine Master taught. It is thus we prepare ourselves for those happy regions, where *charity never faileth*; where, in the presence of the God of Love, eternal and invariable friendships unite together all the blessed; friendships, which, by no human infirmity disturbed, by death never separated, shall constitute, throughout endless ages, a great and distinguished portion of the celestial felicity.

SERMON LXVIII.

ON THE CONDUCT TO BE HELD WITH REGARD TO FUTURE EVENTS.

PROV. xxvii. 1.

Boast not thyself of to-morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.

FROM these words I purpose to discourse of the proper conduct which we ought to hold, with regard to futurity, amidst the present uncertainties of life. Time and life are always going on, and to each of us are preparing changes in our state. What these may be,

whether for the better or for the worse, we cannot tell; as it hath pleased the wisdom of Providence, to cover futurity with a veil which no mortal can lift up. In the mean time, none of us can avoid forming designs, and laying plans, for the time to come. The present moment is never sufficient to give full employment to the active mind of man, without some excursions into futurity; and in these excursions, the present is often wholly spent. It is therefore of the highest consequence, that a proper direction be given to the mind, in its employments of thought relating to futurity. Otherwise, in the prospects which we take of that unknown region, false hopes, or ill-grounded fears, shall flatter or torment us in vain. *We know not*, as the Wise Man tells us, *what a day may bring forth*. It may, very probably, produce something that we had not looked for; and therefore, instead of *boasting ourselves of to-morrow*, as the multitude are apt to do, it becomes us to be disciplined and prepared, for whatever it may bring.

It is needless to spend much time in confirming the truth, which is the foundation of the admonition in the Text; in proving, either that change and mutability belong to our present state, or that the changes of it cannot be foreseen by us. These are truths so obvious and confessed, that an attempt to confirm them is like proving that all men are to die. At the same time, obvious as they are, it were to be wished, that the thoughts of men dwelt upon them more. For, by a strange but prevailing deception, it would seem, from the general conduct of mankind, that almost every one thinks his own case an exception from the general law; and that he may build plans with as much confidence on his present situation, as if some assurance had been given him that it were never to change. Hence it has been often observed by serious persons, that there is no more general cause to which the vices of men can be ascribed, their forgetfulness of God and their neglect of duty, than to their presuming upon the continuance of life, of pleasure, and prosperity.

Look but a little way, my friends, into your own state; and you must unavoidably perceive that, from the beginning, it has been so contrived by Providence, that there should be no permanent stability to man's condition on earth. The seeds of alteration are every where sown. In your health, life, possessions, connexions, pleasures, there are causes of decay imperceptibly working; secretly undermining the foundations of what appears to you the most stable; continually tending to abolish the present form of things, and to bring forward new appearances, and new objects in their order: So that nothing is, or can be, stationary on earth. All changes, and passes. It is a stream which is ever flowing; a wheel which is ever turning round. When you behold the tree covered with blossoms in the spring, or loaded with fruit in the autumn, as well may you imagine, that those blossoms, or that fruit, are to remain in their place through the whole year, as believe that human affairs are to continue, for to-day and to-morrow, for this year and the next, proceeding in the same tenour. To render this reflection still more serious, think, I pray you, on what small and inconsiderable causes those changes depend, which

affect the fortunes of men, throughout their whole lives. ~~How~~ soon is evil done! There needs no great bustle or stir, no ~~long~~ preparation of events, to overturn what seems most secure, and to blast what appears most flourishing. A gale of wind rises on the ocean; and the vessel which carried our friends, or our fortunes, is overwhelmed in the deep. A spark of a candle falls by night in some neglected corner; and the whole substance of families is consumed in flames before the morning. A casual blow, or a sudden fall, deranges some of our internal parts; and the rest of life is distress and misery. It is awful to think, at the mercy of how many seeming contingencies we perpetually lie, for what we call happiness in this world.

In the midst, however, of all these apparent contingencies, plans and designs for the future are every day formed; pursuits are undertaken; and life proceeds in its usual train. Fit and proper it is, that life should thus proceed. For the uncertainty of to-morrow was never designed by Providence, to deter us from acting or planning to-day; but only to admonish us, that we ought to plan, and to act, soberly and wisely. — What that wise and sober conduct is which becomes us, what the rules and precautions are, which, in such a state as ours, respect futurity, I now proceed to show. They may be comprehended in the following directions. Boast not thyself of to-morrow; Despair not of to-morrow; Delay not till to-morrow what is proper to be done to-day; Prepare thyself for whatever to-morrow may bring forth; Build thy hopes of happiness on something more solid and lasting than what either to-day or to-morrow will produce.

I. In the words of the Text, *Boast not thyself of to-morrow*; that is, never presume arrogantly on futurity; in the most fair and promising state of fortune, beware of pride and vanity; beware of resting wholly upon yourselves, and forgetting Him who directs the changes of this mutable state. If there be any virtues which the uncertain condition of the world inculcates on man, they are, assuredly, moderation and humility. Man was, for this end, placed in a world, where he knows so little of what is before him, that he might be impressed with a sense of his dependence on the Ruler of the world; that he might feel the importance of acquiring favour and protection from Heaven, by a life of piety and virtue; and that, not knowing how soon his own condition may be the same with that of the most wretched, he might be prompted to act towards all his brethren the humane and friendly part. — The favours which Providence bestows upon him at present, he ought to receive with thankfulness, and may enjoy with cheerfulness. Though commanded not to *boast himself of to-morrow*, the meaning of the precept is not, that he must be sad to-day. Rejoice he may in the day of prosperity; but certainly, *Rejoice with trembling*, is the inscription that should be written on all human pleasures.

As for them who, intoxicated with those pleasures, become giddy and insolent; who, flattered by the illusions of prosperity, make light of every serious admonition which the changes of the world give

them, ~~what~~ can I say too strong to alarm them of their danger? — They ~~have~~ said to themselves, *My mountain stands strong, and shall never be moved. To-morrow shall be as this day, and more abundantly. I shall never see adversity.* — Rash and wretched men! are you sensible how impious such words are? To the world, perhaps, you dare not utter them; but they speak the secret language of your hearts. Know, you are usurping upon Providence; you are setting Heaven at defiance; you are not only preparing sharper stings for yourselves, when the changes of life shall come, but you are accelerating those changes; you are fast bringing ruin upon your own heads. For God will not suffer pride in man; and the experience of all ages hath shown, how careful he is to check it. In a thousand memorable instances, the course of his government has been visibly pointed against it. *He sheweth strength with his arm, and scattereth the proud in the imagination of their hearts.* The day of the Lord is upon every one that is proud and lifted up; to humble the lofty looks of man, and to stain the pride of all glory.†* Some of the ministers of divine displeasure are commissioned to go forth; and to humble, without delay, the *boasters of to-morrow.*

II. As we are not to boast, so neither are we to despair, of to-morrow. The former admonition was directed to those whom prosperity had elated with vain hopes. This is designed for those whom a more adverse situation in life has filled with fears and alarms of what is to come. The reason of both admonitions is the same; *thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.* It may bring forth some unexpected misfortunes; and therefore thou shouldst be humble in prosperity. It may bring forth some unforeseen relief; and therefore thou shouldst hope under distress. — It is too common with mankind to be totally engrossed and overcome by present events. Their present condition, whatever it is, they are apt to imagine, will never change; and hence by prosperity they are lifted up, and by adversity are dejected and broken; prone, in the one case, to forget God; in the other, to repine against him. Whereas, the doctrine, which the changes of the world perpetually inculcate, is, that no state of external things should appear so important, or should so affect and agitate our spirits, as to deprive us of a calm, an equal, and a steady mind. Man knoweth neither the good, nor the evil, which is before him. In your *patience, therefore, possess your souls:* trusting in the day of to-morrow, that God hath not *forgotten to be gracious;* and that, *thou shalt weeping may endure for a night, joy cometh to the upright in the morning.*

Distress not yourselves, then, with anxious fears about to-morrow. Let me exhort you to dismiss all solicitude, which goes beyond the bounds of prudent precaution. Anxiety, when it seizes the heart, is a dangerous disease, productive both of much sin, and much misery. It acts as a corrosive of the mind. It eats out our present enjoyments, and substitutes, in their place, many an acute pain. — The Wise Man, in the Text, *has* advised us *not to boast of to-morrow;* and our Saviour *has* instructed us *to take no thought for to-morrow.‡* Both

* Luke, i. 51.

† Isaiah, ii. 11, 12. — xxiii. 9.

‡ Matt. vi. 34.

these directions, properly understood, are entirely consistent; and the great rule of conduct, respecting futurity, is compounded of them both; requiring us, neither arrogantly to presume on to-morrow, nor to be anxiously and fearfully solicitous about it. *The morrow*, says our Saviour, *shall take thought for the things of itself*. We shall be better able to judge of the course most proper for us to hold, when events have begun to come forward in their order. Their presence often suggests wiser counsels, and more successful expedients, than it is possible for us to contrive at a distance. By excess of solicitude before-hand, we frequently introduce that confusion of mind, and that hurry and disorder of spirits, which bring us into the most unfavourable state for judging soundly.—Wherefore, never indulge either anxiety or despair about futurity. Affright not yourselves with imaginary terrors. Anticipate not evils, which perhaps may never come. Make the best which you can of this day, in the fear of God, and in the practice of your duty; and, having done so, leave to-morrow to itself. *Sufficient for the day*, when it comes, *will be the evil thereof*.

III. DELAY not till to-morrow any thing which is fit and proper to be done to-day. Remember, that thou art not the lord of to-morrow. Thou art so far from having any title to dispose of it, that thou art ignorant of the most material circumstances relating to it; not only of what it shall bring forth, but whether thou shalt live to see it.—Notwithstanding the incontrovertible evidence of this truth, procrastination has, throughout every age, been the ruin of mankind. Dwelling amidst endless projects of what they are hereafter to do, they cannot so properly be said to live, as to be always about to live; and the future has ever been the gulph in which the present is swallowed up and lost.—Hence arise many of those misfortunes which befall men in their worldly concerns. What might at present be arranged in their circumstances with advantage, being delayed to another opportunity, cannot be arranged at all. To-morrow being loaded with the concerns of to-day, in addition to its own, is clogged and embarrassed. Affairs, which have been postponed, multiply and crowd upon one another; till, at last, they prove so intricate and perplexed, and the pressure of business becomes so great, that nothing is left, but to sink under the burden. Of him, therefore, who indulges this lingering and delaying spirit in worldly matters, it is easy to prognosticate that the ruin is not far off.

Evils of the same kind, arising from the same cause, overtake men, in their moral and spiritual interests. There are few, but who are sensible of some things in their character and behaviour, which ought to be corrected, and which, at one time or other, they intend to correct; some headstrong passion, which they design to subdue; some bad habit, which they purpose to reform; some dangerous connexion, which they are resolved to break off. But the convenient season for these reformatations is not yet come. Certain obstacles are in the way, which they expect by-and-by to surmount; and therefore they go on in peace for the present, in their usual courses, trusting, at a future day, to begin their designed improvement. In the mean time the

angel of death descends; and, in the midst of their distant plans, executes his commission, and carries them away. — Guard against delusions of this kind, which have been fatal to so many. — Thou art now in tranquillity, in health, in possession of a calm mind. Improve these advantages, for performing all that becomes thee, as a man, and as a Christian; for, who can tell how long thou shalt be permitted to enjoy them? New alterations of fortune may be just coming forward; new troubles in public, or in private life, about to arise; new exigencies ready to throw thee into some condition, which shall leave thee neither leisure nor opportunity to execute any of the good purposes thou hast at present in thy mind. Wherefore, trifle no longer with what is so serious, and what may be so critical; but to-day, while it is called to-day, listen to the voice of God, and do his works. *Do now, as the Wise Man advises, with thy might whatsoever thy hand findeth to do; for there is no work, nor device, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.** — Instead of delaying till to-morrow what ought to be done to-day, let me exhort you,

IV. To be every day prepared for whatever to-morrow may bring forth. There is a certain preparation for the vicissitudes of life, in which the multitude are sufficiently busied; providing, as they think, against whatever may happen, by increasing their riches, and strengthening themselves by friends, connexions, and worldly honours. But these bulwarks which they erect are totally insufficient against the dreaded storm. It is to some other quarter we must look for our defence; for when it is the world itself, whose changes we have reason to dread, the world, and the things of it, cannot afford us protection. The best preparation for all the uncertainties of futurity consists, in a well-ordered mind, a good conscience, and a cheerful submission to the will of Heaven. You know not what shall be on to-morrow. But there is One who knows it well; for his decree hath fixed it. To him look up with reverence; and say, “*Not my will, but thine be done*; what thou appointest is ever wise, and “just, and good.” Seek to fulfil the part which he hath assigned you; to do the things which he hath commanded you to do; and leave all the rest to him. Whatever to-morrow brings forth, let it find you employed in doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with your God; and then you shall meet to-morrow without fear, when you meet it without the upbraidings of guilt.

If it shall bring forth to you any unexpected good, prepare to receive it with gratitude, temperance, and modesty. If it shall bring forth evil, prepare to receive it with manly fortitude. Let no events of any kind derange your equanimity, or shake your constancy. Contract your desires, and moderate your hopes. Expect not more from the world than it is able to afford you. Take it for granted, that what is naturally mutable, will one day change; that what was designed to be transient, will pass away. — Look forward to futurity without impatience. Be not desirous to know it. It belongs to God. Let him bring forward the events of the world, in his own way. Imagine that you continually hear those words, which our Lord once

* Eccles. ix. 10.

addressed to Peter, when he was inquiring about what was to happen to a fellow-disciple, *What is that to thee? Follow thou me, and amidst all the uncertainty of future events, this road of clear and plain duty lies before you; follow Christ, and inquire no farther. Seek no crooked path, in order to avoid impending dangers. Turn not to the right hand, nor to the left; but commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him, and he shall bring to pass the desires of thy heart.*

V. BUILD your hopes of happiness on somewhat more solid and lasting than what either to-day or to-morrow are likely to produce. From what has been said, you may clearly perceive, that he who rests wholly upon this world, builds his house upon the sand. This life, by means of wisdom and virtue, may be rendered to a good man, a tolerable, nay a comfortable state. But he who expects complete happiness from it will be greatly deceived. Man, in his most flourishing condition, were much to be pitied, if he was destitute of any higher hope. Rolling from change to change, throughout all the days of his life, with a dark and unknown prospect always before him in futurity, what would avail a few short interrupted glimpses of happiness, which, from time to time, he was permitted to enjoy? Can we believe, that only for such a state as this, man was designed by his great and good Creator?—No: Let us *bless the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who, according to his abundant mercy, hath begotten us again into a lively hope, by the resurrection of Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away.* Here is the rock on which the mind, however tossed by the storms of life, can securely rest. Here is the object to which a wise man will bend his chief attention, that, after having acted his part on earth with fidelity and honour, he may be enabled, through the merits of his Saviour, to look for a place in the mansions of eternal and untroubled peace. This prospect is the great corrective of the present vanity of human life. It gives significancy and importance to its most transitory scenes; and, in the midst of its mutability, discovers one fixed point of rest. He who is habitually influenced by the hope of immortality, will be able to look without dismay on the changes of the world. He will neither boast of to-morrow, nor be afraid of it; but will pass through the varieties of life with a manly and unbroken mind; with a noble superiority to those fears and expectations, those cares and sorrows, which agitate the multitude.—Such are the native effects of Christian faith and hope. To them alone it belongs, to surmount all the discouragements to which we are now exposed; to render our life comfortable, and our death blessed; nay, to make *the day of our death better than the day of our birth.*

SERMON LXIX.

ON FOLLOWING THE MULTITUDE TO DO EVIL.

EXODUS, xxiii. 2.

Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil. —

IN this world, we are placed as companions and assistants to one another. Depending, for most of the comforts of life, on mutual intercourse and aid, it was necessary, that we should be formed to desire the company, and to take pleasure in the good-will, of our fellows. But this sociability of man, though essential to his present condition, has, like many other good principles, been unhappily warped from its original purpose; and, in the present state of the world, has proved the cause of much evil. For, as vice has abounded in every age, it hath propagated itself much more easily by the assistance of this social disposition. We naturally mould ourselves on the pattern of prevailing manners; and corruption is communicated from one to another. By mutually giving, and taking, the example of sinful liberties, licentiousness spreads and grows; each justifies himself by his neighbour; and the multitude of sinners strengthens one another's hands to commit iniquity. In all the ages of the world, custom has had more power than reason. Few take the trouble of inquiring what is the right path; the greater part content themselves with following that in which the multitude have gone before them. No exhortation, therefore, is more necessary to be frequently given, and to be seriously enforced, than that which we receive from the Text; *Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.*

To acquire a full view of any danger to which we are exposed, is the first measure to be taken in order to our safety. Let us then begin the subject, with considering how much we are in hazard of being misled into vice by the general manners which we behold around us. — No virtue is more necessary to a Christian, but scarcely is there any more difficult to be put in practice, than that firmness of mind which can enable a man to maintain his principles, and stand his ground against the torrent of custom, fashion, and example. Example has upon all minds a secret and insinuating influence, even when we ourselves are insensible of its operation. We imperceptibly slide into some resemblance of the manners of those with whom we have frequent intercourse. This often shows itself, in the most indifferent things. But the resemblance is still more readily contracted, when there is something within ourselves, that leans to the same side which is countenanced by the practice of others. We are always glad to find any apology for indulging our inclinations and passions; and the example of the multitude too readily suggests that apology. Even before corruption has made great progress in our hearts, sometimes mere complaisance and good-nature incline us to fall in with the ways of others. Sometimes timidity and false shame prevent our differing from them: Frequently expectation and interest impel us

strongly to comply. How great is the danger we incur, when, in times of prevailing vice, all these principles of imitation and compliance unite together against our virtue?

The world is too justly said by Scripture, to *lie in wickedness*. It is a school wherein every vice is taught, and too easily learned. Even from our earliest childhood, false sentiments are instilled into our minds. We are bred up in admiration of the external show of life. We are accustomed, as soon as we can understand any thing, to hear riches and honours spoken of as the chief goods of men, and proposed to us as the objects to which our future pursuits are to be directed. We see the measures of outward respect and deference taken from these alone. Religion and virtue are recommended to us, in a formal manner, by our teachers and instructors; but all improvements of the mind and heart are visibly placed, by the world, in an inferior rank to the advantages of fortune. Vices that chance to be fashionable, are treated as slight failings; and coloured over, in common discourse, with those soft and gentle names which express no condemnation. We enter, perhaps, on the world, with good principles, and an aversion to downright vice. But when, as we advance in life, we become initiated in that mystery of iniquity, which is called the way of the world; when we meet with deceit and artifice in all ranks of men; when we behold iniquity authorised by great names, and often rewarded with success and advancement, our original good impressions too soon decay. The practice of the multitude renders vice familiar to our thoughts; and gradually wears off the abhorrence with which we once beheld it. We begin to think, that what is so very general, cannot be highly criminal. The malignity of sin appears diminished, by so many being sharers in the reproach; and instead of men's vices detracting, as they ought to do, from our good opinion of the men, our attachment to the men oftener reconciles us to the vices of which they are guilty.

The countenance which sin receives from the practice of the multitude, not only removes the restraints which are imposed by modesty and shame; but, such is the degeneracy of the world, the shame is too often employed against the cause of religion and virtue. The ridicule of the giddy and unthinking bears down the conviction of the sober and modest. Against their own belief, they appear to adopt the notions of the infidel; and, against their own choice, they join in the vices of the libertine; that they may not be reproached as persons of a narrow mind, and still enslaved to the prejudices of education. How much reason is there to believe that, merely from this timidity of temper, many, whose principles are on the side of religion and virtue, are nevertheless found *walking in the way of sinners, and sitting in the chair of the scornful*? — Interest, too, often coincides with this weakness of disposition, in tempting such persons to follow the multitude. To fall in with the prevailing taste, to suit themselves to the passions of the great, or to the humours of the low, with whom they chance to be connected, appears the readiest way to rise in the world. Hence they are naturally led to relinquish the firmness of an upright character, for that supple and versable turn, which accommodates

itself to the times, and assumes whatever appearance seems most convenient for interest. — Such are the dangers to which we are exposed, in times of corruption, of *following the multitude to do evil*; dangers which require our most serious attention and care, in order to guard ourselves against them. — I proceed to lay such considerations before you as may be useful for that purpose.

In the *first* place, Let us remember that the multitude are very bad guides; are so far from having a title to implicit regard, that he who blindly follows them, may be presumed to err. For prejudice and passion are known to sway the crowd. They are struck by the outside of things; they inquire superficially, admire false appearances, and pursue false goods. Their opinions are for the most part hastily formed, and of course are variable, floating, and inconsistent. In every age, how small is the number of those who are guided by reason and calm inquiry? How few do we find, who have the wisdom to think and judge for themselves, and have steadiness to follow out their own judgment? Ignorance, and low education, darken the views of the vulgar. Fashion and prejudice, vanity and pleasure, corrupt the sentiments of the great. The example of neither affords any standard of what is right and wise. If the philosopher, when employed in the pursuit of truth, finds it necessary to disregard established prejudices and popular opinion, shall we, in the more important inquiry after the rule of life, submit to such blind guidance as the practice of the many; esteeming whatever they admire, and following wherever they lead? Be assured, that he who sets up the general opinion as the standard of truth, or the general practice as the measure of right, is likely, upon such a foundation, to build no other superstructure except vice and folly. — If the practice of the multitude be a good pattern for our imitation, their opinions surely should be as good a rule for our belief. Upon this principle, we must exchange Christianity for Paganism or Mahometanism, and the light of the Reformation for the superstitions of Popery; for these latter have ever had, and still have, the numbers and the multitude on their side. — Our Saviour has sufficiently characterised the way of this world, when he describes the *broad road* in which the multitudes go, as the *road which leads to destruction*; and the path which leads to happiness, as a *narrow path*, which fewer find. From which it is an easy inference, that to have the multitude on our side, is so far from affording any presumption of our being safe, that it should lead us to suspect that we are holding the course of danger.

In the *second* place, As the practice of the multitude is no argument of a good practice, so it cannot afford us either justification, or safety, in what is evil. — It affords us, I say, no justification. Truth and error, virtue and vice, are things of immutable nature. The difference between them is grounded on that basis of eternal reason, which no opinions or customs of men can affect or alter. Whether virtue be esteemed, or not, in the world, this makes it neither more nor less estimable in itself. It carries always a divine authority, which men cannot impair. It shines with an essential lustre, which praise cannot brighten, nor reproach tarnish. It has a right to regu-

late the opinions of men ; but by their opinions cannot be controlled. Its nature continues invariably the same, though all the multitude of fools should concur in endeavouring to turn it into ridicule. *Woe unto them*, says the Prophet Isaiah, *that call evil good, and good evil ; that put darkness for light, and light for darkness ; that put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter ! — Their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom shall go up as dust ; because they have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.**

As the practice of the multitude furnishes no justification to the sinner, so neither does it afford him any safety. Religion is altogether a matter of personal concern. God hath delivered to every man the rule of life ; and every man must think and act for himself ; because for himself he is to answer. If others be wicked, it will be the worse for them ; but it will not, on that account, be the better for us, if we shall be evil also. Let vice be ever so prevalent, it is still that *evil thing which the Lord abhorreth* ; and, *though hand join in hand*, the wicked shall not escape unpunished. So far is the number of offenders from furnishing any ground of safety, that it calls more loudly for divine justice to interpose. It is as easy for the Almighty arm to crush a whole guilty society, as to punish a single individual ; and when the disobedient subjects of God countenance and strengthen one another in licentiousness, by transgressing in troops and bands, it becomes high time for his government to exert itself, and let its vengeance forth. — One could scarcely think that any professor of Christian faith would fancy to himself any apology from the way of the world, when he knows that the declared design of his religion was, to distinguish him from the world, which is said to *lie in sin* ; and that Christ came to call out for himself *a peculiar people*, whose character it should be, *not to be conformed to the world, but transformed by the renewing of their minds*. — So little, indeed, can the practice of the world either justify or extenuate vice, that it deserves our serious consideration,

In the *third* place, Whether there be not several circumstances, which peculiarly aggravate the guilt of those who follow the multitude in evil ? Do you not, thereby, strengthen the power of sin, and perpetuate the pernicious influence of bad example ? By striking off from the corrupted crowd, you might be eminently useful ; you might animate and recover many, whom weakness and timidity keep under bondage to the customs of the world : Whereas, by tamely yielding to the current of vice, you render that current stronger for carrying others along ; you add weight and stability to the bad cause ; you lend to the multitude all the force of your example, for drawing others after them to the commission of evil. — While you are thus accessory to the ruin of others, you are, at the same time, stamping your own character with the foulest and deepest impressions of corruption. By surrendering your judgment, and your conscience, to the multitude, you betray the rights, and degrade the honour, of the rational nature. Nothing great or worthy can be expected of him,

* Isaiah, v. 20. 24.

who, instead of considering what is right in itself, and what part it is fittest for one in his station to act, is only considering what the world will think, or say of him; what sort of behaviour will pass with the fairest show, and be most calculated to please the many. When a man has thus given up the liberty and independence of his mind, we can no longer reckon upon him in any thing. We cannot tell how far he may be carried in vice. There is too much ground to dread, that he will lie, dissemble, and betray; changing himself, without scruple, into every shape that will find favour among those whom he seeks to gain. — While this servility to the world infers baseness towards men, it involves also the highest impiety towards God. It shows that we yield to the world that reverence and submission which is only due to the divine law. We treat the government of the Almighty with scorn; as if his precepts deserved to be obeyed, only when they suited the caprice and the follies of the multitude; and were entitled to no regard, as soon as they contradicted the reigning customs and fashions of the world. — While such conduct carries in it so much wickedness and folly, let us observe,

In the *fourth* place, That the most excellent and honourable character which can adorn a man and a Christian, is acquired by resisting the torrent of vice, and adhering to the cause of God and virtue, against a corrupted multitude. It will be found to hold, in general, that all those who, in any of the great lines of life, have distinguished themselves for thinking profoundly, and acting nobly, have despised popular prejudices, and departed, in several things, from the common ways of the world. On no occasion is this more requisite for true honour, than where religion and morality are concerned. In times of prevailing licentiousness, to maintain unblemished virtue, and uncorrupted integrity; in a public or a private cause, to stand firm by what is fair and just, amidst discouragements and opposition; despising groundless censure and reproach; disdaining all compliance with public manners, when they are vicious and unlawful; and never ashamed of the punctual discharge of every duty towards God and man; — this is what shows true greatness of spirit, and will force approbation even from the degenerate multitude themselves. “This is the man,” their conscience will oblige them to acknowledge, “whom we are unable to bend to mean condescensions. We see it in vain either to flatter or to threaten him; he rests on a principle within, which we cannot shake. To this man you may, on any occasion, safely commit your cause. He is incapable of betraying his trust, or deserting his friend, or denying his faith.” Thus *his righteousness comes forth as the light, and his judgment as the noon*

Accordingly, this steady inflexible virtue, this regard to principle, superiour to all custom and opinion, which peculiarly mark the characters of those, in any age, who have shone as saints or heroes; and has consecrated their memory to all posterity. It was this that obtained to ancient *Enoch* the most singular testimony of honour from Heaven. He continued to *walk with God*, when the world apostatised from him. He pleased God, and was beloved of

him; so that, living among sinners, he was translated to heaven without seeing death; *Yea, speedily was he taken away, lest wickedness should have altered his understanding, or deceit beguiled his soul.** When Sodom could not furnish ten righteous men to save it, Lot remained unspotted amidst the contagion. He lived like an angel among spirits of darkness; and the destroying flame was not permitted to go forth, till the good man was called away by a heavenly messenger from his devoted city. When *all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth*, then lived Noah, a righteous man, and a preacher of righteousness. He stood alone, and was scoffed by the profane crew. But they by the deluge were swept away; while, on him, Providence conferred the immortal honour, of being the restorer of a better race, and the father of a new world. Such examples as these, and such honours conferred by God on them who withstood the multitude of evil-doers, should often be present to our minds. Let us oppose them to the numbers of low and corrupt examples, which we behold around us; and when we are in hazard of being swayed by such, let us fortify our virtue, by thinking of those who, in former times, shone like stars in the midst of surrounding darkness, and are now shining in the kingdom of heaven, *as the brightness of the firmament, for ever and ever.*—As our honour is thus deeply concerned in our acting a steadfast and virtuous part, let us also consider,

In the *fifth* place, How little, in point of interest, can be gained by the favour of the multitude, and how much will certainly be lost, by following them to do evil. We may, thereby, render ourselves more agreeable to some with whom we are connected; and, by artful compliances, may please ourselves with the prospect of promoting our fortune. But these advantages, such as they are, remain doubtful and uncertain. The wind of popular opinion is ever shifting. It will often leave us at a loss what course to steer; and, after all our trouble and anxiety to catch the favourable gale, it may on a sudden forsake us. For the versatility of character, the meanness and inconsistency of conduct, into which a dependant on the multitude is betrayed, frequently render him, in the end, an object of contempt to those whom he sought to please. But supposing him successful in his views, no worldly advantages, which are purchased by dishonourable means, can be either solid or lasting. They bring no genuine satisfaction to a man, who is conscious to himself of having given up his principles to serve the world. As long as he could be satisfied with his own conduct, he might bear up under undeserved discouragement; but when he becomes despicable in his own eyes, worldly honours lose their lustre.—What can the multitude do for you, after you have followed them in evil? They cannot restore to you the peace of an innocent mind, nor heal the sorrows of a wounded spirit, nor shield you from the displeasure of God. They can do little to support you in the hour of affliction, and nothing to deliver your souls in the day of death. Forsaken and disconsolate, the world, for the most part, casts off its votaries in the end; and when you compute

* Wisdom of Solomon, iv. 11.

the final amount, it will prove a very small consolation, that, as you have had sharers in guilt, you shall have companions also in punishment.

Look forward to the issue of things. The multitude of men possess now, in a great measure, the distribution of praise and censure, of success and disappointment, according to their caprice. But this confused and promiscuous distribution is not always to subsist. The day cometh, when we all are to appear before a more discerning Judge, and a more impartial tribunal. The day cometh, when our Lord Jesus Christ shall descend from heaven in all the glory of his Father, to unveil every character, and to *render to every man according to his works*. At that day, how shall he lift up his head, who hath been all his life the slave of the world's opinion; who hath moulded his principles, and his practice, solely to please the multitude; who hath been *ashamed of his Saviour and his words*: and, to gain favour with men, hath apostatised from the native sentiments and dictates of his heart?—To say all in one word: there is a contest now between God and the world. These form the opposite sides which divide mankind. Consider well, to which of these you will choose to adhere. On the one side, lie your allegiance, your honour, and your interest; on the other, lie your guilt and your shame. For the one, conscience and reason; for the other, passion and inclination, plead. On the one hand, are the approbation of God, immortal honour, and divine rewards; on the other,—remember and beware!—are the sting, of conscience, endless punishment, and endless infamy.

SERMON LXX.

ON THE WISDOM OF GOD.*

1 TIM i. 17.

Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory, for ever and ever! Amen.

It is of the highest importance to religious conduct, that our minds be filled with suitable conceptions of the attributes of God. They are the foundations of our reverence for him; and reverence is the foundation of religion. All the Divine perfections are interesting to man. Almighty power, in conjunction with Eternity and Omnipresence, naturally inspires solemn awe. Infinite Goodness relieves the mind from that oppression which Power alone would produce; and, from our experience of present benefits, and our remembrance of the past, creates love, gratitude, and trust. In the middle between these stands the contemplation of Divine wisdom, which conjoins impressions of awe with those of comfort; and while it humbles us

* This concluding Discourse was chiefly intended to be a general recapitulation of instances of the wisdom of Providence, several of which have been more fully illustrated in other Discourses contained in this volume.

into profound submission, encourages, at the same time, our reliance on that *King eternal, immortal, and invisible*, who is justly styled in the Text, *the only wise God*.

Among men, wisdom is a quality entirely different from cunning or craft. It always supposes good and fair intention in the person who possesses it; and imports, that laudable ends are pursued by proper and justifiable means. In like manner, wisdom in the Supreme Being cannot be separated from the rectitude of his nature. It is, in him, an exertion of benevolence; and imports, that the purposes of justice and goodness are carried on and accomplished by means the most effectual. To meditate on some of those instances in which this Divine wisdom is displayed, cannot but be highly favourable to the impressions both of piety and of virtue.

It is difficult to say, whether the natural, or the moral, world, afford the most conspicuous and striking displays of the wisdom of God. Not one, nor many Discourses, nor indeed the study and labour of a whole life, were, in any degree, sufficient to explore them. Of the proofs of wisdom which the natural world affords, I cannot attempt now to discourse. Any illustration of these would lead to discussions of a scientific kind, which more properly belong to the philosopher; and on which philosophy has often employed itself, with much utility and honour. I shall only take notice, that, in proportion as human knowledge hath enlarged its sphere of research and discovery, in the same proportion hath the wisdom of the Creator struck the minds of all inquirers and observers with the highest admiration. All nature is in truth a scene of wonders. In the disposition of the heavenly bodies, and the general arrangement of the system of the universe; in the structure of the earth; in the endless variety of living creatures that fill it; and in the provision made for them all, to enable them to fulfil the ends of their being; it is not easy to determine, whether power, wisdom, or goodness, be most conspicuous. It belongs not only to *the heavens to declare the glory of God, and to the firmament to show forth his handy-work*; in the smallest and most inconsiderable, as well as in the most illustrious works of God, equal marks appear of profound design and consummate art. It has been justly said, that there is not a vegetable that grows, nor an insect that moves, but what is sufficient to confound the atheist, and to afford the candid observer endless materials of devout adoration and praise.

WHEN we turn to the moral world, the field of admiration which opens to us is no less extensive and striking. I can only mention a few instances of that exquisite wisdom which every-where meets us.

In the *first* place, Let us attend to the constitution of human nature. Though we are taught by revelation to consider it as now impaired by the fall, yet, as it stands, we behold the traces of a noble structure, planned and executed with the highest skill. All the powers and faculties bestowed on man are such, as perfectly suit his condition, and adapt him to the purposes for which he was designed. Senses were given him, that he might distinguish what is necessary for the preservation and welfare of his body. Now, suppose that any

one of those senses, the sight, for instance, or the hearing, or the touch, had been in a considerable degree either more blunt, or more acute, than it is at present, what an unhappy change would this have made upon our state? On the one hand, greater imperfection of the organs would have deprived us of all the comfort and advantage which we now enjoy from such powers. On the other hand, a greater degree of exquisite sensibility in them would have rendered life a burden to us. Our senses, instead of being inlets to knowledge and pleasure, would then have become constant avenues to uneasiness and pain. Their powers, therefore, are skillfully adjusted to that measure of strength, which allows them to answer the purposes of health, safety, and comfort; without either falling short of this line of usefulness, or improperly, and hurtfully, stretching beyond it.

In the mind, appetites and passions were placed, as the moving powers of the soul, to impel its activity. But as their impulse required regulation and restraint, reason was, at the same time, conferred as the directing power. — Of all our passions, self-love and the desire of self-preservation were, with the utmost propriety, made the strongest, for a reason which the meanest capacity may comprehend. Every man is most immediately committed by Providence to his own care and charge. He knows his own situation best; and has more opportunities of promoting his own happiness, than he can have of advancing the happiness of any other person. It was therefore fit and wise, that, by the strongest instinct, he should be prompted to attend to himself. — At the same time, as no man standing alone is sufficient for his own welfare, it was necessary that, by mutual sympathy and social instincts, we should be drawn to give aid to one another. Here it deserves our particular notice, that the force of those social instincts is, with admirable propriety, proportioned by Providence to the degree of their usefulness and importance.* Thus, that parental affection, which the helpless state of infancy and childhood renders so needful, is made the strongest of them all. Next, come those ties of blood, which prompt mutual kindness among those who are intimately joined together by brotherhood, and other family-connexions. To these succeeds that valuable instinct of pity, which impels us to assist the distressed, whenever we behold them. To take part with others in their good fortune, belongs to man's social nature, and increases the sum of happiness. At the same time, to take part with the prosperous, is less necessary than to sympathise with the unhappy; and therefore the principle which prompts us to *rejoice with them that rejoice*, is made not to be so strong, as that which impels us to *weep with them that weep*.

But they are not only the laudable and important parts of our disposition, which discover the wisdom of the Author of our frame; even our imperfections and follies are by him rendered subservient to useful ends. — Amidst those inequalities of condition, for instance, which the state of human life required, where it was necessary that some should be rich, and others poor; that some should be eminent and distinguished, and others obscure and mean; how seasonable is

* See Serm. XXXII.

that good opinion which every one entertains of himself; that self-complacency with which he compares himself to others; and that fond hope, which is ever pleasing him with the prospect of future pleasures and advantages in life? Without those flattering sensations, vain as they often are, how totally insupportable would this world become to many of its inhabitants? Whereas, by means of them, Providence hath contrived to balance, in a great measure, the inequalities of condition among mankind. It hath contrived to diffuse pleasure through all ranks; and to bring the high and the low nearer to a level with each other, than might at first be supposed. It hath smoothed the most rugged tracts of human life; and hath gilded with rays of borrowed light its most dreary scenes.

One instance of Divine wisdom, in framing our nature, is so remarkable as to demand particular attention; that is, the measure according to which, God hath dispensed knowledge and ignorance to man. There is nothing of which we are more ready to complain, than of our narrow and confined views of nature, and of Providence, and of all things around us: And yet, upon examination, it will be found, that our views extend, on every side, just as far as they ought; and that, to see and know more than is allowed us, instead of bringing any advantage, would produce certain misery.*—We pry, for instance, with impatient curiosity, into future events. Happily for us, they are veiled and covered up; and one peep behind that veil, were it permitted, would be sufficient to poison the whole comfort of our days, by the anticipation of sorrows to come.—In like manner, we often wish with eagerness to penetrate into the secrets of nature, to look into the invisible world, and to be made acquainted with the whole destiny of man. Our wish is denied; we are environed on all hands with mystery; and that mystery is our happiness. For, were those great invisible objects fully disclosed, the sight of them would confound and overwhelm us. It would either totally derange our feeble faculties, or would engross our attention to such a degree, as to lay us aside from the business and concerns of this world. It would have the same effect, as if we were carried away from the earth, and mingled among the inhabitants of some other planet.—The knowledge that is allowed to us, was designed to fit us for acting our part in our present state. At the exact point, therefore, where usefulness ends, knowledge stops, and ignorance commences. Light shines upon us, as long as it serves to guide our path; but forsakes us, as soon as it becomes noxious to the eye; and salutary darkness is appointed to close the scene.—Thoughtless and stupid must that man be, who, in all this furniture of the human mind, in this exact adjustment of its several powers to the great purposes of life, discerns not the hand of adorable Wisdom, as well as of infinite Goodness.

In the *second* place, Let us contemplate the same wisdom, as exhibiting itself to us in the moral government of the world. We are informed by revelation, that this life is designed by Providence to be an introductory part of existence to intelligent beings; a state of

* See Sermon IV. and Sermon LIX.

education and discipline, where creatures fallen from their original rank may gradually recover their rectitude and virtue. Under this view, which is in itself perfectly consonant to all that reason discovers, we shall find the general course of human affairs, confused as it may sometimes appear, to have been ordered with exquisite wisdom. — It was necessary to such a state, that all the active powers of man should be brought forth into exercise, and completely tried. It became proper, therefore, that there should be a mixture of characters in the world, and that men should be shown in a variety of situations.* Hence that diversity of tempers and dispositions which are found in society; those inequalities in rank and station, which we see taking place; and those different talents and inclinations, which prompt men to different pursuits. By these means, every department in society is filled up; and every man has some sphere prepared for him, in which he can act. He is brought forth as on a busy stage, where opportunity is given for his character to display itself fully. — His life is, with great propriety, varied by interchanges of prosperity and adversity. Always prosperous, he would become dissipated, indolent, and giddy: Always afflicted, he would be fretful, dejected, and sullen. There are few persons, therefore, or none, whose lot shares not of both these states; in order that every disposition of the heart may be explored, and every mean of improvement afforded. — As man is ultimately designed for a higher state of existence than the present, it was not proper that this world should prove a paradise to him, or should afford him that complete satisfaction which he incessantly pursues. Disappointments, therefore, are often made to blast his hopes; and, even while the comforts of life last, they are always mixed with some troubles; in order that an excessive attachment to this world may gradually be loosened. The course of things is evidently so ordered by Providence, that occurrences shall be always happening, to bring down the most prosperous to a level with the rest of his brethren, and to raise up, in their turn, the low and the distressed.

In the midst of those vicissitudes, which are so obviously conducive to improvement, both wisdom and goodness required, that the Supreme Governour of the world should be seen to protect the interests, and favour the sale of virtue. But, in the degree of evidence with which this was to be shown, it was no less requisite, that a proper temperament should be observed. Had virtue been always completely rewarded, and made happy on earth, men would no longer have had a motive for aspiring to a more blessed state. In the case of every crime, had Divine justice interposed to bring complete punishment on the head of the criminal; or had all the felicity which is prepared for the just in a future world, and all the misery which there awaits the wicked, been already displayed to the view, and rendered sensible to the feelings of men; there would have been an end of that state of trial, for which our whole condition on earth was intended. It was necessary, therefore, that, at present, we should *see through a glass darkly*. A certain degree of mystery and obscurity

* See Sermon. LIV.

was, with perfect wisdom, left on the conduct of the Almighty. * — But, amidst that obscurity, sufficient encouragement and support are in the mean time given to virtue; sufficient ground is afforded for the full belief, that it is what the Deity loves, and will finally reward. His approbation of it is signified to every man by the voice of conscience. Inward satisfaction and peace are made always to belong to it; and general esteem and honour, for the most part, to attend it. On the other hand, the wicked, in no situation of life, are allowed to be truly happy. Their vices and their passions are made to trouble their prosperity; and their punishment to grow out of their crimes. Let any one attentively recollect the material incidents of his life; and he will, for the most part, be able to trace the chief misfortunes which have befallen him, to some guilt he has contracted, or some folly he has committed. † Such is the profound wisdom with which Providence conducts its counsels, that although it does not appear to interpose, men are made to reap from their actions the fruits which they had deserved; their iniquities *to correct them, and then backslidings to reprove them*; and while they suffer, they are forced to acknowledge the justice of their punishment. — These are not matters of rare or occasional observation; but deeply interwoven with the texture of human affairs. They discover a regular plan, a formed system, according to which the whole train of Providence proceeds; and which manifests to every serious observer the consummate wisdom of its Author. — As thus, in the constitution of human nature, and in the moral government of the world, Divine wisdom so remarkably appears, I must observe,

In the *third* place, That in the redemption of the world, and in the economy of grace, it shines no less conspicuously. The subject which opens to us here is too extensive to be fully illustrated at present; but the great lines of it are obvious. ‡ — In carrying on a plan, by which forgiveness was to be dispensed to an offending race, wisdom required that the authority of the legislator should be fully preserved, and no such relaxation be introduced into government, as might give licence or encouragement to offenders. Accordingly, the most admirable provision was made for these important purposes, by the interposition of the Son of God suffering and dying for sinners. The sovereign awe of justice is maintained, while justice is tempered with mercy. Men are bound to righteousness, under the highest sanctions; and ample security and consolation are, at the same time, afforded to the penitent. By the instructions, and example, of their Saviour, they are instructed in their duty; and, through a Mediator and Intercessor, they are encouraged to offer their worship and prayers to the Almighty. They are assured that, in whatever is too arduous for human nature to perform, they shall be assisted by a Divine Spirit; and, under all trials and difficulties, they are supported by the express promise of that eternal life, which is brought to light by the Gospel. — It is not possible for the understanding to conceive any method of salvation, planned with more goodness and executed with

* See Sermon. IV.

† See Sermon. LXIII.

‡ See Sermons V. XX. XXX. LV.

more wisdom, than what is shown in the Gospel of Christ. The consideration of this constitution alone, gives us full reason to join in that exclamation of the Apostle: *O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and the knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!**

From this short survey which we have taken of Divine wisdom, as discovering itself, in the whole complex frame of the moral world; in the constitution of human nature; in the government of human affairs; and in the redemption of the human race; we cannot but perceive how much reason we have to prostrate ourselves before God, and with all humility to worship and adore.—When we view that immense structure of the universe in which we dwell; when we think of Him, whose wisdom has planned the whole system of being; whose mind comprehends, whose counsels direct, the whole course of events, from the beginning to the end of time; by whom nothing is so inconsiderable as to be overlooked, or so transient as to be forgotten; who attends to the concerns of the poor man in his cottage, while he is steering the sun and the moon in their course through the heavens; into what astonishment and self-annihilation do we fall! Before him all our boasted knowledge is ignorance, and our wisdom is folly. Wherever we cast our eyes on his works and ways, we find all things adjusted in *number, weight, and measure*; and after all that we can survey, Lo! these are but a part of his ways; and *how small a portion is heard of him!*

It is the power of God, which produces among the multitude of men any impressions of religion. When thunder roars in the heavens, or an earthquake shakes the ground, they are struck with awe, and disposed to worship an invisible power. But such impressions of Deity are occasional and transitory. The lasting reverence of a Supreme Being arises, in a well-informed mind, from the display of that infinite wisdom which all the universe presents. Its operations are constantly, though silently, going on around us. We may view it in the peaceful and sedate state of the universe, as well as in its greatest commotions; we behold it in every insect that moves on the ground, at the same time that we admire it in the revolutions of the celestial bodies. Happy for us, if the contemplation shall nourish that temper of habitual devotion, which so well becomes dependent beings, and is so intimately connected with all virtue!†

But the chief effect that ought to be produced by meditation on the Divine wisdom, is perfect resignation to the Governour of the universe, and entire trust in his administration. Our private misfortunes and disappointments are too often the subject of querulous complaints, and even of unjust suspicions of Providence. But when, in the whole natural and moral world, we behold an arrangement of things which plainly discovers the most consummate wisdom, can we believe that, in the arrangement of our petty concerns, this wisdom is dormant and neglectful? How much more reason is there to think, that our ignorance of the Divine plans misleads our judgment, than that the wisdom of the Almighty has erred in directing our private

affairs? — Divine wisdom, as I observed in the beginning, is an exertion of Divine benevolence. It has, it can have, no other scope than to accomplish the best ends by the most proper means. Let the wisdom therefore, and the goodness, of the Deity, be ever conjoined in our idea. Let every new discovery of Divine wisdom be a new ground of hope, of joy, and of cordial submission, to every virtuous man. Let him be thankful that he lives in a world, where nothing happens to him by chance, or at random; but where a great, a wise, and beneficent Mind continually superintends every event.

Under the faith of this great principle of religion, let us proceed in the course of our duty, with steadfast and undismayed mind. Let us retain faithful allegiance to our Creator and our Redeemer; and then we may always hope the best; and *cast our care upon him who careth for us. Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart. Although thou sayest, thou canst not see him, yet judgment is before him; therefore trust thou in him.* — Let us begin every undertaking with an humble dependence on his assistance for enabling us to prosecute it to the end. When our undertakings are finished, and the close of life approaches, with praise to him let us conclude all our labours.

Unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

SERMON LXXI.

THE COMPASSION AND BENEFICENCE OF THE DEITY.

[Preached before the Society for the Benefit of the Sons of the Clergy of the Established Church of Scotland, 20th May, 1766.]

JER. xlix. 11.

Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.

No subject is more open to general observation; or more confirmed by manifold experience, than the goodness of God. The contemplation of the universe, in which we dwell, presents it perpetually to our view. Amidst the vast extent of creation, we discover no instance of mere pomp, or useless grandeur, but behold every thing contributing to the general good, and rendered subservient to the welfare of the rational or sensible world. In the administration of Providence, the same principle of beneficence is conspicuous. The seasons are made regularly to return, and the earth to flourish; supply is bountifully provided for the wants of all creatures; and numberless comforts are prepared to sweeten human life. Most justly is he who hath established, and who upholds, this admirable order of things, to be esteemed the Father of mercies: and, accordingly, in this view, he is often celebrated in Scripture. *The earth is full of the goodness of*

the Lord. His tender mercies are over all his works. His mercy is great unto the heavens, and it endureth for ever.

It appears worthy of particular observation that there is one light, in which more frequently than in any other, the goodness of God is presented to us in the Sacred Writings; namely, the light of compassion to the distresses of mankind. Most of the situations are mentioned in which men are considered as most forlorn; and, in some passage of Scripture, God is represented as interesting himself, in a peculiar manner, for those who are in such situations. Particular emphasis is always laid upon this circumstance, in the general views which are given of his goodness. He is the *Hearer of prayer unto whom all flesh shall come*. But he is described as listening with particular attention to the *cry of the poor*; and regarding the *prayer of the destitute*: *He will prepare their heart, and cause his ear to hear*.^{*} All creatures are the objects of his providential care. But the *widow and the fatherless, the bowed down and the broken in heart* †, are particularly attended to, and commiserated by him. *The Lord executeth judgment for the oppressed; the Lord preserveth the stranger; he looseth the prisoner, and giveth food to the hungry. He hath not despised nor abhorred the affliction of the afflicted; nor hides he his face from them; but hears when they cry unto him.* ‡ In short, when we are deprived of all human consolation and aid, the Almighty is represented as then most accessible to our prayers, and most disposed to help and relieve us.

The words which I have chosen for the Text afford a very amiable view of that compassion which Scripture so often ascribes to the Supreme Being. The context in which they stand contains much dark and mysterious prophecy relating to nations in the neighbourhood of Judæa, but leads to no particular illustration of the Text. The words of it, taken by themselves, are plainly to be understood as spoken by God to an aged parent, who, in the view of approaching dissolution, is anxious about the future condition of his family in the world; and they present a most affecting display of God's compassionate regard to the children of those who have been his faithful servants on earth. *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me*. — It will be worthy of our attention at present,* to inquire into the reasons why the Almighty is pleased to represent himself so often to us under this view; not only as the just and good Ruler of the universe, which is the first and leading idea we naturally form of him, but as the Patron and Friend of the distressed part of mankind.

It will be found that there are two very important purposes which such discoveries of the Divine nature serve. First, they furnish particular ground for trusting in God, amidst all the vicissitudes of human life; and next, they exhibit the pattern of that disposition, which we ought, in our measure, humbly to follow and imitate.

I. THE discoveries of Divine compassion were purposely intended to furnish to us particular ground for trust in God, amidst all the

* Psalm cii. 17. — x. 17.

† Psalm lxxviii. 5.

‡ Psalm lxi. 33. — cxlvi. 7. — xxii. 24, &c.

vicissitudes of human life. Man, during his abode on earth, is exposed to various distresses. Even in his most flourishing state, his condition is extremely precarious. Prosperous as he may at one time seem to be, he cannot tell how soon, by some unforeseen vicissitude, he may be humbled to the dust; and still less can he tell what may in future befall his children, to whose fortunes he often looks with anxious solicitude. In the moments when his mind is oppressed, either by the immediate feeling of sorrows or by the dread of impending evils, it is natural for him to fly to that Supreme Being, under whose direction all human events are placed, and earnestly to implore protection from him. — But though he hold the belief that justice and goodness are ever to be found at the throne of the Almighty; yet, even there, particular discouragements meet him. For that Supreme Being to whom he looks up is a great and awful Being. His nature is, to us, unknown. He dwells in the secret place of Eternity; and is surrounded with clouds and darkness. We hear his tremendous voice in the thunder; and in every commotion of the elements we behold the irresistible hand of his power. A nature so infinitely superiour to our own cannot be looked up to without some measure of dismay. It is overwhelming to the timid apprehension of the distressed. It is contemplated with that awful and mysterious reverence which overpower, confidence and trust.

It is for this reason that, in condescension to human weakness, God has been pleased so often to represent himself as actuated by a principle of compassion and pity. This gives a shade and softening to the awful greatness of the Divinity. It brings down his goodness to the level of our conception, and fits it to be the object of our trust. Compassion is a principle which we all feel and know. We know that it is the strongest of all benevolent instincts in our nature, and that it tends directly to interest us in behalf of those who need our aid. We are taught to believe, that a similar attribute belongs to the Divine nature; in order that, from that species of goodness which we are best acquainted with, and which we can most rely upon, we may be trained both to love our almighty Benefactor, and as long as we are in the practice of our duty, to trust to his protection, amidst every distress. When we hear such a voice of tenderness, as that which my Text utters, proceeding from the Almighty, our hearts are comforted. Distrust and dismay are removed. We are no longer oppressed by his greatness. We can draw near to him as to a Father in heaven, before whom we can, with humble confidence, pour out our sorrows; and can trust that, though all our earthly friends should neglect us, our prayers will attract his compassionate regard.

Compassion to the unfortunate, as it is exerted among men, is indeed accompanied with certain disturbed and painful feelings, arising from sympathy with those whom we pity. But every such feeling we must remove from our thoughts, when we ascribe an affection of this nature to the Deity. It is true, that, in Scripture language, the Divine compassion is sometimes figured by strong allusions to the relenting struggles and passionate meltings of the human heart. But we easily perceive that such representations are to be understood

with the allowances which figurative language requires. All that is amiable in compassion, belongs to God; but all that is imperfect in it, must be left to man. In the Supreme Being, there can be no perturbation or uneasiness; no contrast of feelings, nor fluctuation of purpose. His compassion imports a kind regard to the circumstances of the unhappy. But still it is such a regard as suits the perfection of the great Governour of the universe, whose benignity, undisturbed by any violent emotion, ever maintains the same tranquil tenour, like the unruffled and uninterrupted serenity of the highest heavens.

It is important to observe, that this pity and compassion of our heavenly Father extends itself to our moral and spiritual concerns, in like manner as to our natural and external distresses. In that great dispensation of the redemption of the world by his Son Jesus Christ, he is always represented in Scripture as moved by pity for our fallen and wretched estate. The same principle which leads him to regard with compassion the widow and the fatherless, led him to look down with compassion on an helpless and forlorn race, degraded from their original honour. From infinite mercy he sent his Son to seek and to save that which was lost. According to the prophetic language of the Old Testament, *He looked upon us; and his time was a time of love. He saw that there was no man; He beheld that there was no intercessor, and his own arm brought Salvation.* He laid his help on one who was mighty to save. He saw us in our blood, and said, Live.*—Agreeable to this spirit of compassion, displayed in our redemption, is the whole dispensation of Divine grace towards man in his present state of infirmity. It speaks continually the doctrine of consolation and merciful aid; *grace to be sufficient for us, and strength to be made perfect in our weakness. As a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him: for he knoweth our frame; he remembereth that we are dust.†*

I cannot conclude this head without observing how much it adds to the value of the Christian religion, that it hath discovered the Deity to us in a light so amiable. When the nations of the earth worshipped a God unknown, or one whom they arrayed in nothing but vengeful thunders, the true God hath come forth from behind the cloud, and made himself known to us; known not only as a just and good Ruler, but as a compassionate Father, in whom, amidst all their distresses, the virtuous may trust and hope. I now proceed to observe,

II. THAT such discoveries of the Divine nature were designed, not only to administer encouragement and consolation, but also to exhibit the pattern of that disposition which we are bound, in our measure, to imitate and follow. To this purpose tend the repeated exhortations of Scripture, *to be followers of God, as dear children; to be merciful, as our Father in heaven is merciful.* That hardness of heart which renders men insensible to the distresses of their brethren, that insolence of prosperity which inspires them with contempt of those who are fallen below them, are always represented in Scripture as

* Ezek. xvi. 8. Isaiah, lix. 16.

† 2 Cor. xii. 9. Psalm ciii. 13, 14.

dispositions most opposite to the nature of God, and most hateful in his sight. In order to make this appear in the strongest light, he hath turned his goodness chiefly into the channel of compassionate regard to those whom the selfish and the proud despise. He hath avowedly taken up their cause, that he might state himself as an antagonist to such as would bear them down; that he might confound and put to the blush that arrogance of men which makes them slight any of their own brethren. *For the oppression of the poor, for the sighing of the needy, now will I arise, saith the Lord, to set them in safety from him that puffeth at them.** Lord, says the Psalmist, *thou hast heard the desire of the humble; thou wilt arise to judge the fatherless, and the oppressed, that the man of earth may oppress no more.†*

Consider, I beseech you, whether any virtue can admit of any higher recommendation than its being that disposition under the character of which the Almighty chooses to be peculiarly known to us: How can we claim any relation to the Father of mercies, or how look up to him for compassion and grace, if we show no bowels of mercy, gentleness, and kindness, to one another? — The whole plan, indeed, on which he hath formed human nature, and all the circumstances in which he hath placed us on earth, are plainly contrived to excite affections of benevolence, and to enforce works of mercy. Not only hath he planted compassion in the human breast, as one of the strongest instincts there, but he hath so connected us in society, as necessarily to require that our benevolent instincts should be brought into exercise. For it is apparent that no man, in any rank of life, even the highest, is sufficient for his own well-being. He can neither supply his own wants, nor provide for his own comforts, without the co-operation of others. The dependence here is mutual between the high and the low, the rich and the poor. Each, in one way or other, calls on each for aid. All are so linked together, as to be impelled by a thousand motives to assist one another in the time of need. This is what nature, what society, what Providence, all speak with a loud voice; a voice which may be said to have gone forth even to the ends of the earth, and to have been heard and understood by the most barbarous tribes of men. For among savage and uncultivated nations, no less than among the most civilized and polished, the energy of compassion is felt, and its claims are recognized and obeyed.

In the course of human life, innumerable occasions present themselves for all the exercises of that humanity and benignity, to which we are so powerfully prompted. The diversities of rank among men, the changes of fortune to which all, in every rank, are liable, the necessities of the poor, the wants of helpless youth, the infirmities of declining age, are always giving opportunities for the display of humane affections. There is perhaps no form in which benevolence appears more interesting, than when it is employed in providing relief for the families and children of those who stand in need of aid, in order that the young may be trained up by proper education for acting an useful part in the world. Benefits conveyed by this channel are often more important than any other acts of liberality. Besides the great

* Psalm xii. 5.

† Psalm x. 17, 18.

advantage which they bring to society, they have the pleasing effect of awakening all the virtuous sensibilities of the heart, both in those who confer, and in those who receive them. They are often felt with a warmer relish by a family in distress, and productive of more tender gratitude, than could have been raised by any other mode of beneficence. This is rendered sensible to every heart by that beautiful expression of the Divine compassion in the Text; *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*

By the train of sentiment we have pursued, your thoughts, my brethren, will now be naturally led to the consideration of that institution which has given occasion to the meeting of this day; *The Society formed for the Benefit of the Sons of the Clergy of the Established Church of Scotland.*

In entering on this part of the subject, I trust that I may be permitted to say a few words concerning that order of men, in behalf of whose descendants the favour of the public is now requested. Though belonging myself to that order, yet as my advanced age and long experience may reasonably be supposed to have corrected the prejudice, and cooled the ardour of partiality, some weight, I hope, will be allowed to my testimony; when now, in the fifty-fourth year of my ministry, after having seen successions of ministers, in various parts of the country, rise and fall, and after long acquaintance with many, of divided sentiments, among my brethren, I can with confidence declare it as my opinion, that there exists not any where a more respectable and useful class of men than the Clergy of the Church of Scotland. Among such a numerous body, I readily admit that some exceptions will be found to the character which I now give of them. Considering human frailty, this is no more than was naturally to be expected. But, taking the ministers of this church in general, I can venture to assert, that they are a well-informed and enlightened set of men; decent and irreproachable in their behaviour, conscientious in the discharge of their pastoral duties, and very generally esteemed by the people under their care. There was a time, when the Presbyterian clergy lay under the imputation of being sour in their tempers, narrow in their opinions, severe and intolerant in their principles. But as, together with the diffusion of knowledge, a more liberal spirit has pervaded the clerical order in this part of Britain, it will be found that their manners now are conciliating; that they study to promote harmony and good order in their parishes; that they have shown themselves addicted to useful literature, and in several branches of it have eminently distinguished themselves; and that while they are edifying and consolatory to the lowest, they have acquired just respect from the higher classes of men.

As long, therefore, as this country shall be preserved from the contagion of that false philosophy, which, by overthrowing all religious establishments, has engendered so much impiety, and wrought so much mischief, in a neighbouring land; as long as the existence of Christian faith, and of religious principles, shall be considered as essential to the welfare of a nation, it may reasonably, I think, be

expected, that such a body of men as I have mentioned shall be held entitled to the regard and good-will of their fellow-citizens and countrymen.

Circumstances there are, which give particular occasion for this regard and good-will to be called forth. You all know the nature of that provision which is made by the public for the established clergy of this country. It is such as is suited to that sober and frugal manner of living which is expected from ministers of the Gospel. Though in consideration of the growing prosperity of the country, and of its natural consequence, the increased rate of every expence, it has been found reasonable that, of late years, some addition should be made to the provision of many of the ministers, yet still their condition approaches not to what can be termed opulence in any degree. It is such as to raise them above contempt; such as to afford a decent subsistence for themselves and their families; but such as seldom or never can enable them, without some other sources of revenue, to make provision for their children when going forth into the world, especially if their family be numerous.

It was the consideration of this circumstance that lately gave rise to the Society in favour of the Sons of the Clergy. Many a minister who, for a tract of years, has faithfully laboured in the discharge of every duty to his flock, has felt, towards the close of his days, what a blessing it would have proved to him, if such a society had existed in his time, to which he could have looked for aid. — Represent to yourselves, my friends, one of this character, — and the representation which I am now to give is not the work of fancy, but founded upon what often in fact takes place. — Figure, I say, a worthy clergyman now in the decline of life, foreseeing the end of his labours drawing near, surrounded with a family of children, to whom his chief care had been devoted, and in whom his heart had long been bound up. Their education, from their earliest years, he had conducted, or at least superintended himself, with paternal fondness. Whatever his scanty stores could afford he had cheerfully expended, in giving all the advantage to their education which his own village, or which the nearest county town, could yield. He had made every preparation that was in his power to make, for their acting a proper part in future life. But the time of preparation is finished. The gay season of childhood is over. The period is arrived when they must go forth; must leave that paternal mansion where, in the midst of their youthful companions, they had spent many happy days; must go to provide for themselves, the best they can, in a world, which to them is unknown. And whither are they to go? — Of the few friends their father ever had, some are now gone down to the dust. Others, with whom he once lived in familiar intimacy, lifted up now with the pride of opulence, have forgotten him and his family. One of his sons, at least, he fondly wished to have educated for that profession to which he himself had been so long attached. But, living at a distance from any of the seats of learning, and having no protector to whose assistance he could look, he feels with regret that he is unable for the attempt. Some of his children he must send away to seek

their fortunes in a distant land. Others must be consigned to the dangers of the ocean, or be reduced to gain their bread by following some of the mean and laborious occupations of life. Viewing the dark and discouraging prospect that is before them, the father's heart is sore, when he bids adieu to his children. With tears in his eyes, he gives them his blessing as they depart. Little more it is in his power to give them; but he commits them to the protection of their Father's God.—How happy, if, in these mournful moments, a voice of such a nature as this could reach his ears: *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me.*

ANIMATED by the desire of imitating that spirit of Divine compassion which breathes in these words, a few respectable gentlemen in this city formed, six years ago, the plan of a Society for assisting the Sons of the Clergy. The institution, as soon as it was known, met with public approbation and favour. It was early distinguished, and amply assisted by Royal munificence. It was incorporated by Royal charter; and, through the generosity of the public, has prospered so far, that the Society has already been enabled to give aid to a considerable number of the Sons of Clergymen of this Church. The aid which the Society, in an infant state, could as yet give, has been small; as it is confined to what the interest of their capital allows them to bestow. They earnestly wish to become more effectually useful, by enlarging their provision for the education of Sons; and hope to be enabled, in due time, to give assistance to the Daughters, as well as to the Sons, of ministers; so as to afford comfort to a widowed mother, and to the whole of a disconsolate family. For, it is to be observed, that it is not merely to a literary education, or to preparation for the church, that the intentions of the Society are directed. They mean so to apply their beneficence, that the families of ministers may be assisted to acquire the necessary qualifications for pursuing any useful employment in the world, for which they appear to be most fitted.

Among other inducements which may encourage the public to promote this beneficent plan, there is one which I cannot, on this occasion, omit to mention; that is, the signal success with which many Sons of Scots Clergymen have been blessed, in filling with honour several of the important departments of society. As I have not myself the honour of belonging to that class, I can speak with more freedom on this topic than some other of my brethren. Not to mention the well-known and distinguished names of several who at present possess, with much dignity, stations in the church, and chairs in the universities, and some, now gone, who will be long remembered, as having done no small honour, by their literary productions, to this part of the island; let me desire you to look round on the most respectable stations of busy life, and to consider how many of those who now make a high figure at the bar, some on the bench, many in the commercial, the military, and the naval professions, were born and bred under the humble roof of a minister;—Nor is this success to be ascribed to any favourable coincidence of circumstances at this time more than any other. It is the natural result of the manner in

which they were brought up. Educated in good principles, and formed to sober manners, by pious and virtuous parents, they enter on the world less tainted than others by fashionable vices and follies. By the situation of their parents they were inured, from their earliest youth, to temperance and habits of application. They come forward, not altogether ignorant and unlettered, like the children of the meaner classes of men, but with the foundations of good education and useful knowledge. At the same time, they see and know that it is not to fortune and to friends, but to their own industry and exertions, they must trust for future success; and that only, according to the opinion entertained of their merit, they can hope to be patronized by others. Hence it comes to pass that young persons of this description often advance themselves more quickly, and act their part more successfully, than others who, from their birth and fortune, have enjoyed the benefits of a more improved and ornamented education; but whose opulence sometimes supersedes labour, encourages indolence, and perhaps fosters dissipation and love of pleasure.

These are considerations which tend to bespeak public favour in behalf of the institution which I now recommend. Consider, my friends, that by befriending and assisting it, you contribute to bring forward a new race, who, like those of the same rank that have gone before them, may come, in their day, to be beneficial to their country and to the world. It must not be forgotten, that assistance to bring them forward becomes now more necessary than it was to the former race, in consequence of the great additional expence which is well known now to attend every part of education. By reasonable generosity, on this occasion, you may be ripening in secret the seeds of future genius; you may be bringing forward to maturity those young plants which shall flourish hereafter in the land; and which may perhaps attain such strength, and rise to such a height, as to protect others under their shade.

To the honour of the present age, it must be acknowledged not to be deficient in a spirit of humanity. Frequent instances both of public and private beneficence come forth on every proper occasion. In this city, many a noble monument appears of charitable foundations and institutions; some destined to educate the children of the needy; others to furnish maintenance for the poor, to provide for the aged, or to receive and relieve the sick and the distressed. By their means much timely succour is given, and many a distress is mitigated. The institution for the sake of which we are now assembled, partaking of the same benevolent spirit with the others, reaches to a more respectable class of men, and aims at a more extensive object. Its purpose is, to prevent those evils which would arise to the public, from the children of worthy parents being left to languish in that hopeless indigence which throws them first as a burden on society, and may afterwards render them a dangerous nuisance to it. Instead of this, it aims at bringing them into such a state as affords a reasonable prospect of their proving useful members of the community, and perhaps of their ranking among its ornaments and supports.

So good a design Providence has already begun to favour, and we hope will continue to bless. After we are laid in the dust, the generation that succeeds us may experience its happy effects. They who now contribute by their generosity to carry it forward will, in the mean time, enjoy the satisfaction of having adopted the benevolent spirit of the Christian religion, they will enjoy the satisfaction of having imitated, as they could, that compassion of our heavenly Father, which, in so affecting a manner, is expressed by the words of the Text; words, which I hope will continue to dwell, with a lasting and tender impression, on all our hearts; *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive; and let thy widows trust in me!*

SERMON LXXII.

ON HOPES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS.

Prov. x. 28.

The hope of the righteous shall be gladness; but the expectation of the wicked shall perish.

ATTACHMENT to futurity has a remarkable influence on the operations of the human mind. The present, whatever it be, seldom engages our attention so much as what is to come. Remembrance of the past may sometimes occupy our thoughts; but what for the most part fills them, is the anticipation of the future. The present is apt to be considered as an evanescent scene, just about to pass away; and in the midst of wishes and desires, of hopes and fears, which all respect futurity, we may be said to dwell. As on these the life of man is so much suspended, it becomes a very material part both of wisdom and of duty to attend to any regulations by which they may be properly conducted. For if expectations and hopes on one hand, and fear, and alarms on the other, are suffered to arise with groundless precipitancy, and to acquire an undue ascendancy, it is evident that they will produce much delusion in conduct, and often will engender much vice and guilt. As there is a *hope of the Righteous which shall be gladness*, so there is an *expectation of the Wicked which shall perish*. The anticipations of the former, conducted by prudence and regulated by piety, mislead him not from his duty, and afford him satisfaction in the end. While the expectation of the latter, arising from fantastic imaginary prospects, delude him for a while with vanity, and terminate in misery. It will therefore be an useful subject of meditation, to consider, in a few instances, of what we may, and of what we may not, reasonably expect from the world, when we look forward to what is most likely to happen in the ordinary course of human affairs.

I. We are not to expect the uninterrupted continuance of any measure of health, prosperity, or comfort, which we now enjoy. There is the greater reason for beginning with this admonition, as

there is a strong propensity in human nature to imagine that what we at present possess is always to remain. When no warnings of any approaching change appear, we are all inclined to look forward to futurity with a smile; and to indulge the hope that *to-morrow shall be as this day*, and even *more abundantly*. Hence, in the lives of thoughtless men, there breaks forth so much folly and presumption, so much pride and levity, and often so much impiety and contempt of religion. *What is the Almighty that we should serve him? Or what profit shall we have, if we pray unto him? Our mountain stands strong; and shall never be moved.*

On the lot of some men, Providence is pleased to bestow a longer continuance of prosperity than on that of others. But as the term of that continuance is hidden from us, all flattering and confident expectations are without foundation. At one period or another, it is certain that the calm is to be troubled, and the dark cloud is to arise; and how soon that period is to come, you cannot tell. In your health, or your fortune, or among your connexions and friends, be assured that some trial awaits you. For human life never stands still for any long time. It is by no means a fixed and steady object, like the mountain or the rock, which you always find in the same situation; it is a river continually moving and flowing. Neither is it the still and smooth stream which glides along with the same constant tenour; but a river which for a time may hold a regular course within its banks, till, being interrupted by rocks, it foams into a torrent, or, swoln by foreign currents, it lays waste the neighbouring plains. Amidst such vicissitudes of time and life, who has any title to reckon upon the future?—To faults, all are subject; to troubles, all are exposed. As that man is the most virtuous who can be charged with the fewest faults, so that life is the happiest which suffers the fewest troubles. To look for entire exemption from them is to court disappointment.

At the same time, I do not mean to hold it forth as any precept of religion or wisdom, that we ought always to sadden the present hour by dwelling on the thoughts of future disappointment. What is given us, let us cheerfully enjoy, and render thanks to Him who bestows it. Virtue, conjoined with prudence, may reasonably afford the prospect of good days to come. *For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.** Such a prospect therefore he may innocently indulge, if he preserve always that temperance and moderation, that modesty and humility, which become one who knows that his state is ever in hazard of changing. But I mean to warn those who, giving way to the elation of giddy hopes, lose the command of themselves, that by this intoxication of mind they are preparing the way for an alteration of state; they are pushing forward the wheels of advancing change; they are accelerating their own downfall. To them belongs that admonition of the wise man, would they seriously listen to it: *If a man live many years and rejoice in them all, yet let him remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many: all that cometh is vanity.†*

* Eccles. ii. 26.

† Eccles. xi. 8.

II. WE are not to expect, from our intercourse with others, all that satisfaction which we fondly wish. What the individual either enjoys or suffers by himself, exhibits only an imperfect view of his condition. In the present state of human affairs, we are all so closely interwoven with one another, that a very material part of our happiness or misery arises from the connexions which we have with those who are around us, and the relations in which we stand to them. These, therefore, open a field within which our wishes and expectations find an ample range. One of the first objects of wish to every one, is to maintain a proper place and rank in society; not to fall behind his equals; but rather, if he can, to surpass them, so as to command consideration and respect from his neighbours. This, among the vain and ambitious, is always the favourite aim. With them it arises to immoderate expectations, founded on their supposed talents and imagined merits. But perhaps, in the hearts of all men, some wish of this nature lurks; some wish not to be overlooked in the crowd, but to attain that degree of distinction which they conceive they might reasonably claim.

With respect to claims of this sort, it is to be apprehended that, among persons of all characters and descriptions, many an *expectation must perish*, and many a disappointment be endured. For such is the power which the sophistry of self-love exercises over us, that almost every one may be assured, that he measures himself by a deceitful scale; that he places the point of his own merit at a higher degree than others will admit that it reaches. All are jealous of the high pretensions of others. He who suspects a rival in his neighbour, will study every method of bringing him down to what he takes to be his proper level; nay, often of depreciating him below it. Hence the endless mortifications which the vain and self-conceited suffer. Hence the spleen and resentment which is so often breaking forth, disturbing the peace of society, and involving it in crimes and miseries. Were expectations more moderate, they would be more favourably received. Did we more rarely attempt to push ourselves into notice, the world would more readily allow us, nay sometimes assist us, to come forward. Were we content sometimes to remain in the shade, we would with more advantage come forth into sunshine, and find the brightness interrupted by fewer clouds.

In the closer connexions which men form of intimate friendship and domestic life, there is still more reason for due moderation in our expectations and hopes. For the nearer that men approach to each other, the more numerous the points of contact are in which they touch, the greater indeed will be the pleasure of perfect sympathy and agreements of feelings; but, at the same time, if any harsh and repulsive sensations take place, the more grating and pungent will be the pain. — If you look for a friend, or a partner of your life, in whose temper there is not to be found the least inequality, who upon no occasion is to be hurt or offended by any frailties you discover, whose feelings are to harmonize in every trifle with yours, whose countenance is always to reflect the image of your own, you look for a pleasing phantom, which is never, or, at most, very

rarely, to be found; and if disappointment ~~sour~~ your mind, you have your own folly to blame. You ought to have considered, that you live in a region of human infirmity, where every one has imperfections and failings. You assuredly have your own. What reason had you to imagine, that the person whom you love and esteem was to be the only exception from the common fate? Here, if any where, it becomes you to overlook and forbear; and never to allow small failings to dwell on your attention so much as to deface the whole of an amiable character. From trifling misunderstandings, arising from the most frivolous causes, springs much of the misery of social and domestic life. Hence is blasted many a pleasing blossom of hope; and many an *expectation*, which once promised unbroken harmony, is left to *perish*. I shall only mention,

III. ANOTHER instance of what we are not to expect in the ordinary course of human affairs; that is, constant gratitude from those whom we have most obliged and served. I am far from saying that gratitude is an unknown, or even a rare virtue among mankind; I think not so ill of human nature. On the contrary, it is my belief, that grateful sensations for favours received are very generally felt; and, when no strong passion counteracts those sensations, that grateful returns are generally intended, and often are actually made. But, then, our expectations of proper returns must be kept within moderate bounds. We must not carry them so far as to imagine, that gratitude is to produce unlimited compliance with every desire which we choose to indulge; or that they whom we have obliged will altogether desert their own interest for the sake of their benefactors. Many circumstances, it is to be remembered, tend to cool the grateful emotion. Time always deadens the memory of benefits. Sometimes they are considered as having been fully recompensed, and the debt of gratitude repaid. As benefits conferred are often underrated by those who receive them, so they are sometimes over-valued by those who confer them. On persons of light and careless minds, no moral sentiment makes any deep impression; with such, the remembrance of both benefit and benefactor is apt to pass speedily away. With the proud spirit, which claims every thing as its due, gratitude is in a great measure incompatible. From persons of this character, we are never to expect it; and, indeed, from persons of any character, we are not to be surprised, if, in the present state of the world, it rises not so high as we thought we had reason to hope.

HAVING thus shown in some material instances what we have no reason to expect in the ordinary course of human affairs, I turn next to the brighter side of the subject, and shall show what a wise and good man may reasonably expect from human life. *His hope shall be gladness, though the expectation of fools shall perish.*

I. WHATEVER course the affairs of the world take, he may justly hope to enjoy peace of mind. I am sensible that, by the sceptic and the profligate, this will be held as a very inconsiderable object of expectation or hope. To them every enjoyment which is of a mental and intellectual nature appears of small value. Give them

affluent fortune and flourishing health, and they account themselves sure of felicity. But to these very persons I appeal, whether there have not been many occasions, when the want of a peaceful and self-approving mind has not blasted all the enjoyments they possessed? In the midst of the pomp and luxuries of life, have they never experienced the pangs of a *wounded spirit*? Have they never felt what it was to be tormented by the sense of past follies, and to be stung with the reproaches of an angry conscience? Dare they say, that in the midst of those feelings they were happy? Will they not be constrained to own, that in such moments of inward pain, they would willingly have exchanged conditions with an innocent peasant? Let them then learn the value of that object of hope which they affect to condemn, by recollecting what they have suffered from the want of it. — Assuredly, the peace of an approving conscience is one of the chief ingredients of human happiness; one of the most grateful of all sensations to the heart of man: provided always that this self-approbation rest upon proper grounds; that it be tempered with due humility, and regulated by Christian faith; that it never swell into an arrogant opinion of our virtue, or into confidence in our own merits, as if they were sufficient, without any higher intervention, to render us acceptable to God.

He, whose study it is to preserve a conscience void of offence towards God and man, who upon just principles can be satisfied that he is walking in the path which was appointed by God, will have, in every state of fortune, a ground of hope which may justly be denominated *gladness*; for peace of mind will not forsake him. Let the world vibrate around him as it will, and repeat all its vicissitudes, he will not be shaken by them. He has always somewhat to rest upon for comfort. Wrapped up in his own integrity, he remains sound and entire within himself; and with a firm mind awaits the coming storm. *He is not afraid of evil tidings; for his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord.** As he can look up to a Supreme Power with good hope, so he can look every man in the face without uneasiness, when he is conscious that no man can reproach him with having entrenched upon his neighbour's rights, or having causelessly provoked and attacked him. Hence, a calm mind by day, and undisturbed slumbers by night. Hence, the hope of that continued protection of Heaven which watches over the righteous. *In the time of trouble He shall hide me in his pavilion; in the secret of his tabernacle shall he hide me; He shall set me upon a rock.†* Besides this expectation of internal peace,

II. A good man has ground to expect that any external condition into which, in the course of human affairs, he may pass, shall, by means of virtue and wisdom, be rendered, if not perfectly agreeable, yet tolerably easy to him. That distresses of various kinds are scattered through the life of every mortal man, there can be no doubt. But it is also to be remembered, that to many distresses there are remedies which it is in our power to apply; and that with all sorrows some comforts are mixed. So many loud complaints we

* Psalm cxii. 7.

† Psalm xxvii. 5.

hear of the inequalities of fortune in the world, that one would imagine the rich and the great to be the only persons who had the privilege of being happy; and that the mean and the poor were doomed, without exception, to be miserable. Be assured, my friends, that the inequality of real happiness is not to be measured by the inequality of outward estate. When you see the peasant cheerful in his cottage, and the labourer singing in the fields, you may discern that there is some power in the mind superiour to external condition; that more depends on the man himself, than on the situation in which the world has placed him. Would you estimate justly the sum of happiness that he enjoys, or the degree of unhappiness that he feels? The questions you are to put, if the man be in prosperity, are not, How much wealth does such a man possess? but, How does he enjoy it? If he be in adversity, not, What is his distress? but, How does he bear it?

Hence arises the hope to a wise and good man, of either finding, or making his state tolerable to himself. If he be not wanting to himself, he is never left without resources to assist those exertions which he makes in his own behalf. Roses indeed are not always strewed in his path; but from fields that are seemingly waste, flowers may be gathered by those who look carefully around them. Seldom or never do all good things forsake, and all evils beset, a man at once. In some corner of our lot there are always comforts that may be found, if we be not so foolish as to overlook them. Even in the intervals of sickness and pain, satisfactions may be enjoyed. Returns of relief are often felt with a more lively sensation of pleasure, than what we taste in unbroken health. It has been often observed, that what is very severe of any kind, seldom lasts long; and the uneasiness which lasts, we become accustomed to bear. Time and continuance reconcile us gradually to many things that were at first believed to be insupportable. Providence has in mercy provided this gentle opiate to assuage various sorrows of human life. What we behold others around us bearing, we learn to think may also be borne by us. *The spirit of man will long sustain his infirmities.* From the treasures of his own mind in reflection and meditation, much relief will arise to the virtuous; and at the bottom of the most disconsolate estate, there lies always a secret hope that better days may come. — From such circumstances as these, the expectation of passing through life with some measure of comfort, may reasonably be entertained by such as are not wanting to themselves in propriety of conduct. In looking forward to futurity, the prospect we are to take of the world is not that which is sometimes gloomily indulged, of a forlorn region, where nothing is to be beheld but dreary and inhospitable wastes, and no objects are to be met with but serpents that hiss, and wild beasts that devour. The prospect is rather that of a mixed region, where indeed rugged rocks are seen, and deserts extend, over which the tempest sometimes scowls; but where also many peaceful habitations and fruitful fields occur to refresh the sight. Once more,

III. We have ground to expect from the ordinary course of human affairs, that if we persevere in studying to do our duty towards God and man, we shall meet with the esteem, the love, and confidence of those who are around us. I before observed, that in our expectations of receiving what we think due respect and consideration from the world, we shall be often disappointed. But that observation was applied to the claims we make on others, on account of talents, abilities, and superiour merits. To such claims the world is seldom disposed to give a favourable reception. We live amidst rivals and competitors, whose self-estimation prompts them to depreciate us, and of course subjects us to many a mortification. The case is different with respect to moral qualifications. There the world is more ready to do justice to character. No man is hurt, at least few are so, by having his neighbour esteemed a worthy and honourable man. This praise will be bestowed, without grudging, by many who value themselves on the possession of qualities, which they conceive to be of superiour importance in the judgment of the world.

But whatever they may think, it is certain that the basis of all lasting reputation is laid in moral worth. Great parts and endowments may sparkle for a while in the public eye. The world looks up to them with wonder, as to an extraordinary comet, or a blazing star. Distinguished virtue and worth create less astonishment; but, like the fixed luminaries of heaven, they shine with more steady and permanent lustre. Unaffected piety conjoined with inviolable uprightness and integrity in conduct, command a degree of respect which approaches to veneration. Candour and fairness never fail to attract esteem and trust. Kindness and benevolence conciliate love, and create warm friendships.—The best character may indeed for a time be accidentally obscured and misunderstood. But the world commonly judges soundly in the end. After a man has acted his part for a while among his fellows, he is known upon trial to be what he is; and if his worth be real and genuine, *his righteousness comes forth as the light, and his judgment as the noon-day.*

This is what a good man has always ground to look for, even in evil times; and surely, there are few things which he can more desire, than the prospect of being valued and esteemed by those among whom he lives. This counterbalances many a disadvantage of outward fortune, and puts into his hand many opportunities of satisfaction and comfort. He is likely to possess many friends and well-wishers, and to have few enemies. The more he is known, the more will the favour of those who surround him grow; and the prospect is before him, of having his *hoary head crowned with honour.*

Thus, in several instances, I have briefly pointed out what may, or may not, be expected from the world, when we look forward to the ordinary course of human affairs: Not an uninterrupted enjoyment of all the comforts of prosperity; not undisturbed satisfaction in our various intercourses with society; not grateful returns from all whom we have obliged or served; But what we may expect, if we keep a good conscience and study to do our duty, is peace of mind; a tolerably easy and comfortable state, amidst the vicissitudes of life;

and the love and esteem of those with whom we are connected. — *The hope of the righteous shall be gladness.*

THE present subject has led me to consider only what the righteous man has to hope for in the ordinary course of the world. But I have now to observe, that he has before him a much higher object of hope than any which I have yet mentioned; a hope which arises not from the ordinary course of human affairs, but from an extraordinary interposition of divine grace and mercy conveyed to us by the Gospel; even the *hope which is laid up for him in heaven*; the assured expectation of a better life, in a higher and better world. Put the case of the servant of God being overwhelmed with all the disappointments which the world can bring upon him, here is an expectation which will be always gladness; with which he can perpetually solace himself. Through the present state of existence he is no more than a passenger. If he can render it in any degree tolerable and easy to himself, it is well; it is all that he expects. His home, his place of rest, is in those habitations to which, through the merits of his Redeemer, he is taught and encouraged to aspire. He knows that *in due season he shall reap, if he faint not.** That when the *earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, he shall have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*†; for to them who, by patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory, honour, and immortality, God will render eternal life.‡ Hence, whether you consider him in this life, or consider him as looking forward to another, his hope is perpetual gladness, while the expectations of the wicked shall perish.

SERMON LXXIII.

ON THE PROPER DISPOSITION OF THE HEART TOWARDS GOD.

Acts, xvii. 28.

In him we live, and move, and have our being.

THERE is nothing which all nature more loudly proclaims, than that some Supreme Being has framed and rules this universe. *Day uttereth speech of it to day, and night sheweth knowledge of it to night.* Our birth and our life, our sensations and our actions, the objects which we behold, and the pleasures which we enjoy, all conspire to testify that some wonderful intelligence has disposed and arranged, and still supports and animates, the whole frame of nature. This is what scarcely any man of sober mind ever called in question. It was the dictate of nature to the most savage and barbarous, as well as to the most civilized nations. The American and the Indian in his desert, as well as the Grecian sage and the Roman conqueror, adored, each, after his own mode, a Sovereign of the Universe. — The Psalmist observes, that *the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.*§ Among the follies, however, with which the human race is chargeable, this is

* Gal. vi. 9.

† 2 Cor. v. 1.

‡ Rom. ii. 7.

§ Psalm xiv. 1.

one which, in the course of ages, seemed to have made the smallest progress. It was reserved for modern times and evil days, to engender, in one region of the earth, a system of false philosophy, which should revive the exploded principles of atheism, and study to pour forth their poison among the nations, not only to the extinction of religion, but to the subversion of established governments, and of good order among mankind.

Dismissing all delusions of this nature as unworthy the attention of any reasonable unperverted mind; holding it for certain that nothing can be more real than the existence of a Supreme Divinity, it follows of course from this belief, that there are dispositions correspondent to Him which ought to be found in every human mind, among the young and the old, among the high and the low, the rich and the poor. It is absurd to suppose, that, while the relations in which we stand to our fellow-creatures, whether as equals, superiours, or interiours, naturally call forth certain sentiments and affections, there should be none which properly correspond to the first and greatest of all Beings; to Him, whom, though we see him not, we all recognise; to Him, *in whom*, as it is beautifully expressed in my Text, *we live, and move, and have our being*.

THE proper disposition of mind with respect to God, is generally expressed by the term of Love to him. This is very justly founded on the solemn injunction of our blessed Lord. *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind; this is the first and great commandment.** Hence, it is common among religious writers to include the whole of pious affections towards God in Love. But when this term is applied to the Almighty, we must be careful to understand aright what it imports. We all know what it is to love any of our fellow-creatures; but such an affection as we bear to them, cannot in a literal sense be transferred to God. Among them it is sometimes connected with the fervency of passion; it commonly imports some similarity of nature, and some degree of fond and intimate attachment; all which it were highly improper in us to affect towards the Supreme Being, *whose ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts*. I am afraid that the application of Love in a strict sense, and sometimes in too fervent and passionate a strain towards God, has, among some serious and well-disposed minds, given rise to no little enthusiasm in religion.

When therefore we treat of Love as applied to God, it must be analysed or resolved into those sentiments which are proper and suitable for us to encourage towards the God whom we adore. That Love of him which religion requires, and which our Saviour has so solemnly enjoined, is a compounded affection, and the dispositions which it includes are principally three; reverence, gratitude, submission. Of the nature and foundation of each of these I am to treat in the sequel of this Discourse, and shall endeavour to illustrate them as forming that temper and disposition of mind, which we ought always to preserve towards the Great Author of our existence.

* Matt. xxii. 37, 38.

I. THE foundation of every proper disposition towards God must be laid in Reverence, that is, admiration mixed with awe; what, in its lower degrees among men, is called Respect; but carried to its highest point with relation to God, may be termed profound Veneration. In this disposition towards Him we ought habitually to be found, not only in the exercises of immediate devotion, but amidst the ordinary occurrences of life. Every thing indeed that we see around us gives perpetual occasion for it. We find ourselves in an immense universe, where it is impossible for us, without astonishment and awe, to contemplate the glory and the power of Him who hath created it. From the greatest to the least object that we behold, from the star that glitters in the heavens to the insect that creeps upon the ground, from the thunder that rolls in the skies to the flower that blossoms in the fields, all things testify a profound and mysterious wisdom, a mighty and all-powerful hand, before which we must tremble and adore. Neither the causes nor the issues of the events which we behold, is it in our power to trace; neither how we came into this world, nor whither we go when we retire from it, are we able of ourselves to tell; but in the mean time find ourselves surrounded with astonishing magnificence on every hand. We walk through the earth, as through the apartments of a vast palace, which fill every attentive spectator with wonder. All the works which our power can erect, all the ornaments which our art can contrive, are feeble and trifling in comparison with those glories which nature every-where presents to our view. The immense arch of the heavens, the splendour of the sun in his meridian brightness, or the beauty of his rising and setting hours, the rich landscape of the fields, and the boundless expanse of the ocean, are scenes which mock every rival attempt of human skill or labour. Nor is it only in the splendid appearances of nature, but amidst its rudest forms, that we trace the hand of the Divinity. In the solitary desert, and the high mountain, in the hanging precipice, the roaring torrent, and the aged forest, though there be nothing to cheer, there is much to strike the mind with awe, to give rise to those solemn and sublime sensations which elevate the heart to an Almighty, All-creating Power.

In short, we can no where cast our eyes around us without meeting what is sufficient to awaken reverence of the Deity. This reverence becomes the more profound, that the great Being who is the object of it, is to us invisible and unknown. We may seek to discover him, but he hides himself from us; his footsteps we clearly trace, but his face we can never behold. *We go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but we cannot perceive him: on the left hand, where he worketh, but we cannot behold him; he hideth himself on the right hand, that we cannot see him.** We know that *he is not far from every one of us*; yet he shrouds himself in the darkness of his pavilion; he *answereth from the secret place of thunder.*† Before this incomprehensible Being, this God terrible and strong, we become in a manner annihilated; we are sensible that in his sight we are only as *the drop of the bucket and the small dust in the balance*; and in his

* Job, xlii. 8, 9.

† Psalm lxxxi. 7.

presence can only *rejoice with trembling*. For we know that the mighty arm which upholds the universe, and which surrounds us with wonders on every side, can in a moment crush us to the dust, if we become objects of displeasure to heaven. Awful are the operations of the Divine Power which we are constantly beholding in the moral as well as in the natural world. The Almighty rules among the nations, as well as over individuals: on his pleasure depend all the great revolutions of the earth; the interpositions of his Providence are frequently apparent to the world, in bringing down the mighty, and raising up the fallen. In the books of the law and the prophets, we hear his threatenings against rebellious sinners denounced with a tremendous voice; and in the dispensation of the Gospel, a most striking instance is exhibited to us of the strict justice of his government, in the expiation that was required for the apostacy of a guilty world. So that both the Law and the Gospel, the works of nature and the conduct of Providence, unite in uttering that solemn voice which ought often to resound in our ears: *Be still, and know that I am God. I will be exalted among the heathen; I will be exalted in the earth.** *Fear before him, all ye nations: Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name. For honour and majesty are before him; strength and beauty are in his sanctuary.†* *He alone doeth great things and unsearchable; marvellous things without number.‡*

On this head of discourse I have insisted the more, because I apprehend that such sentiments as I have now been inculcating occur too rarely among many professed Christians. Did an awful reverence for the Supreme Being dwell on all our minds with a properly impressive sense, its effects would oftener appear in conduct. On many occasions, it would check a wanton levity of spirits. It would infuse more solemnity into our religious acts. It would inspire greater respect for the temples of God, and for all the forms of sacred worship. It would banish that profanation of the name of God, which we so often hear from unhallowed lips. — Let it be remembered that the *fear of God* is, throughout much of the Scripture, employed as the term descriptive of the whole of religion. It is not the fear which slaves are constrained to feel for a tyrant, but the reverence which children have for the best parent, or subjects for the best sovereign; the veneration which necessarily enters into the love we bear to a Being of superiour order: it is to *fear the Lord and his goodness§*, as it is emphatically expressed by one of the prophets. This *fear of God*, therefore, is not only consistent with the love of him, but forms a material part of it. The pretended love of God detached from reverence of him, would no longer be genuine love, but would rise into arrogant presumption. I proceed to observe,

II. THAT gratitude forms an essential part of that disposition which we ought to bear towards God. This implies an affectionate sense of God upon the mind, and enters directly into love, understood in its most common acceptation. It were a gross mistake to imagine, that the reverence of which I have discoursed has any tendency to check gratitude; on the contrary it heightens it, by uniting

* Psalm xli. 10.

† Psalm xcvi. 6—8.

‡ Job, v. 9.

§ Hosea, iii. 5.

the sense of our benefactor's condescension with the benefits which he conveys. The more eminent the qualities of a benefactor are, and the higher the rank is in which he stands, our hearts are warmed the more by the feeling of his goodness.

It is impossible to think of God at all, without conceiving him as the benefactor of mankind. Mysterious as this world is in many of its appearances, it nevertheless carries, on the whole, a strongly marked character of goodness and benignity in its author. We behold a vast system obviously contrived to provide, not food and nourishment only, but comfort also and enjoyment to an infinite number of inhabitants. The more that philosophy has enlarged our views of nature, the more it has been discovered that, throughout the wide extent of creation, there is no useless profusion of magnificence, but that every thing has been rendered subservient to the welfare of the rational or sensible world; nay, that many objects, which were once considered as not only superfluous but noxious, hold an useful place in the general system. Such provision has been made for our entertainment on this earth, such care has been taken to store the world with a variety of pleasures to cheer our senses and enliven our imagination, that he whose eye opens on all the beauty of nature, must be of insensible heart indeed, if he feels no gratitude to that Being who has brought him forth to enjoy this wonderful scene.

But the gratitude of a good man will naturally go farther than this. He will think not only of the benefits which he enjoys in common with the rest of his fellow-creatures, but of those which are appropriated particularly to himself. — Who is there amongst us, my brethren, but in fairly reviewing the events of his life from infancy to this day, in thinking of the comforts he enjoys, and recollecting the dangers from which he has been delivered; who is there, I say, that has not cause to acknowledge an invisible Guardian, who has all along watched over his frail estate, has protected and blessed him? — Perhaps, of the blessings which you enjoy, or the deliverances you have received, you are more disposed to trace some human cause; one favourable distinction you ascribe to your birth, your parents, or your education; for some other happy circumstance you think yourself solely indebted to the kindness of an earthly friend, or you refer it to the exertions of your own dexterity and talents. — Thoughtless and inconsiderate man! Have you forgotten that there is a first Cause of all, a Supreme Lord, who, from the beginning, has arranged and prepared the whole series of causes and effects, of whose destination and agency men are no more than the secondary instruments? To what but to the original plan of his goodness, do you owe the favourable circumstances of your birth or your education, the kindness which he ordained to spring up in the breast of your friend, or the talents and abilities which he implanted within you, in order to favour your success?

But an exhortation to gratitude, you perhaps consider as coming unseasonably in your present situation. The time was, when the light of the Divine countenance shone upon you, and looking up to a Benefactor in heaven, with a grateful heart you acknowledged your

blessings to be derived from Him; but that time is now past; you are left desolate and forsaken, bereaved of the chief comforts on which you had set your hearts. And, because many of the favours of heaven are past, ought they to be gone from your remembrance? Are there not still some others remaining, for which you have reason to give thanks? Have you forgotten all the blessings you have continued to enjoy ever since the day that you came forth a helpless infant into the world? Be assured that a gratitude of that sort, which dies away as soon as it ceases to be fed by the usual stream of benefits, which has regard to present favours only, and none to those that are past, is not true gratitude, but the symptom of a selfish and mercenary spirit. If you be disposed to thank God only when he is giving you all the desires of your hearts, what praise have ye? Do not publicans and sinners the same? Men who have little either of religion or sensibility of heart. But when Providence shrouds itself in a dark cloud, and some of your favourite enjoyments are carried away, if still, with calm and patient mind, you continue to bless the name of the Lord, and still retain a thankful sense of the blessings you have so long, and so far beyond your deserts, been permitted to enjoy; this is to be truly grateful; this is to show yourselves the dutiful children of a Father in Heaven.

In reviewing the grounds which we have for gratitude to God, it becomes us to attend, not only to those blessings which appertain individually to each of us, but to those also which we enjoy in common with others of our brethren. How much reason have we, for instance, to bless God for having cast our lot in a land where we enjoy all the advantages of mild and equal government, and all the comforts of tranquillity and peace, while many a nation around us is oppressed by the hand of tyrannical power, disturbed with the alarms and terrors of war, or suffering from the ravages of the hostile spoiler? What higher reason still to be grateful for having our lot cast where the joyful sound of the Gospel is heard, where the glad tidings of peace upon earth, and good-will to the sons of men, are announced to us by the Son of God, who came to bring pardon and salvation to a guilty world? What everlasting ground of thankfulness is afforded by the blessed hope that is given us of life immortal; of a house not made with hands, *eternal in the heavens; when the earthly house of this tabernacle shall be dissolved; of an inheritance, incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away*, ascertained to all good men by the death and the resurrection of our blessed Redeemer! *Bless the Lord, O my soul! and all that is within me, bless his holy name, and forget not all his benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities; who healeth all thy diseases; who redeemeth thy life from destruction; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies.** Let us now add,

III. ENTIRE and profound submission, as a disposition most necessary to be preserved on our part towards God. This includes submission of the understanding to the discoveries which God has been pleased to make; submission of the inclinations to the laws which he has promulgated for our conduct; submission of the will

* Psalm ciii. 1—4.

to the dispensations of his Providence, as they affect the events of our life. It is not submission constrained merely by a power against which we know that it is in vain to struggle; it is submission arising from reverence compounded with gratitude; submission to One whose supreme perfection entitles Him to absolute obedience, whose experienced goodness affords ground for implicit trust.

In the present imperfect state of human nature, there will be often found no small reluctance to that entire resignation to God which religion requires. The pride of human understanding will sometimes revolt against the discoveries which God has made in his word, as deficient and unsatisfactory; the struggles of passion will frequently rise against the restraints imposed on us by his laws, and the severities inflicted by his Providence. But in the heart of a pious man all such opposition is checked and borne down, by a steady faith that, under the administration of the Almighty, all is ordered for the best, though for several steps of that high administration we are unable at present to account. Hence that calm tranquillity he preserves, and that resolute and magnanimous submission he maintains, amidst the most unpromising circumstances. He knows that in this stupendous universe, there must be many things that lie beyond our comprehension. — As yet thou seest no more than the rise of the divine government, the beginnings of a great plan which is not to be completed until the course of ages shall end. Meanwhile darkness must be allowed, for wise reasons, to remain upon many things; severe restraints must be imposed on conduct, and occasional sufferings must be endured. If thou sufferest, sigh, and be silent; wait, and be patient. Presume not to exalt thy weak reason against the revelations of Heaven, nor to give vent to thy impatient complaints against the ordinations of thy Supreme Governour. Think with awe, and speak with caution, of what is so much above thee. Wait till thy being shall be unfolded; till it shall have passed through the necessary steps that shall gradually prepare thee for beholding the secrets of the universe; for understanding the counsels of the God who made it. In the mean time, be content to submit and to adore. Let no other voice be heard from thee but this; “Thou hast made me, O God! and I am thine, for *in thee I live, and move, and have my being*. Wherever thou commandest me to go, I follow. Whatever thou appointest me to suffer, I bear without murmur. It is my part to persevere in my duty; all the rest I leave to Thee; to Thee, whose wisdom I revere, whose goodness I have so often experienced; in whom therefore I repose implicit trust that all shall end well, and the righteous be made finally happy.” — *Good is the word which the Lord hath spoken. Not my will, but His be done. Behold, here I am. Let him do to his servant as seemeth good to him.**

Such are the principal dispositions which it becomes us to preserve towards God; to preserve towards Him at all times; not in the solemn hours of devotion only, but when we act in the busy world, or when we walk in retirement amidst the scenes of nature.*

* 2 Kings, xi. 19. Luke, xxii. 42. 2 Sam. xv. 26.

If this union of reverence, gratitude, and submission, habitually possess our minds, they will of course shoot forth into what is termed *delighting ourselves in God*; thinking of him with peculiar complacency and warmth of affection; and elevating us sometimes into a sacred transport when we draw nigh to him in acts of immediate worship, in prayer and praise. Then is the season when the fulness of the soul gives rise to those sublime and pathetic effusions of piety which are recorded of saints in former times: *My soul thirsteth for God; for the living God: when shall I come and appear before him? I will lift up my hands in thy name; my soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and with fatness, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and causest to approach into thee. O, that I knew where to find him, that I might come even to his seat!** When such sentiments as these, of ardent affection towards God, chastened by reverence and submission, as well as warmed by gratitude, predominate in our hearts, and when they exert their proper influence in purifying and regulating our life, we may then be truly said to *love the Lord our God, with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind.*

SERMON LXXIV.

ON THE MORAL CHARACTER OF CHRIST.

ACTS, x. 38.

Jesus of Nazareth — who went about doing good.

THERE are two great aspects under which we may contemplate the appearance of our Blessed Lord on the earth. One is, his coming into the world in order to make expiation to divine justice, by his sufferings and death for the guilt of the human race. The other is, his coming to act as the enlightener and reformer of the world, by his doctrine and his life. The first of those views is the most sublime; as on the atonement which he made for us, depend all our hopes of the pardon of sin, and of life eternal. In the other view, it is also of high importance that all Christians should frequently consider him, in order to the proper regulation of their conduct: the observation of his example is no less necessary for this purpose, than attention to his doctrine; as by his doctrine he taught us what we are bound to do, so in his example he showed us what we ought to be.

Hence the example of our blessed Lord has been ever held up by serious writers to Christians for their instruction and imitation. It obviously possesses many advantages above any other standard of conduct. It carries peculiar obligations from gratitude, interest, and duty; to enforce the imitation of it; and it is the only example, in following which, we are certain never to err. It has also another

* Psalm xlii. 2. — lxiii. 4—6. — lxy. 4. Job, xxiii. 3.

peculiar advantage attending it, which is not so commonly thought of; that is, the universality of its use. It evidently appears that our Lord himself had this benefit to his followers in view from the train of living which he chose to adopt. Had he pitched upon any one station of life, the influence of his example would have been much more limited. The integrity, for instance, of Samuel as a judge, the devotion of David on the throne, the fortitude of Daniel in the midst of a corrupt court, hold forth indeed splendid instances of virtue, but they hold them out only to a few: whereas, when Christ appeared on earth, he confined himself to no one state of fortune or line of life; he did not addict himself to any particular calling; he did not even fix his residence in one place; but he gives us an opportunity of viewing him in different places and situations, in all that variety of lights which indiscriminately regard the bulk of mankind: his life was divided between the contemplative and the active; devotion and business equally shared it. We behold him in private life among his disciples, like a father in the midst of his family. We behold him in public life, acting with authority in the discharge of his high commission, assuming the dignity which belonged to his office, and boldly reproving the great and the powerful. We see him sometimes in poverty and obscurity, contemned and persecuted. We see him at other times elevated into public favour, followed by applauding crowds, and entering Jerusalem in triumph. We can challenge all history, sacred or profane, to show us any eminent personage, saint, philosopher, or hero, whose character was so thoroughly tried, and so fully exhibited to admiration, as that of our Saviour. What adds greatly to the lustre of his example, it was marked by no affected singularities nor peculiar austerities. He did not seclude himself from ordinary society, but conversed among men with that sort of modest piety and virtue which suits itself to the level of human infirmity, and is conspicuous for the discharge of the plain and substantial duties of a good life.

It is not my intention at present to attempt a full survey of all the graces and virtues which distinguished our Lord's life, and ennobled his sufferings and death; as this would lead into a field too extensive for one Discourse: I mean to confine myself to the manner in which he fulfilled the social duties, and exercised his benevolence as a man among men. This will afford an instructive view of what may be termed the moral character of Christ in his ordinary intercourse with the world, and will point out a proper model of our behaviour towards one another. The most studied and laboured encomiums never drew a more amiable character, than what is contained in the few and plain words of the Text; *Jesus of Nazareth went about, doing good.* Let us consider in what manner He fulfilled this character.

I. WE are to attend to his assiduity and alacrity in seeking out and embracing every opportunity of doing good; this is the most substantial part of the great virtue of charity. There is a sort of negative goodness with which most men are ready to be satisfied; they applaud themselves if they have kept their hands free from unjust deeds, and no man can reproach them for working mischief to their

neighbour; but with respect to his welfare, they are totally indifferent. They remain in a sort of torpid apathy about the concerns of others, without either rejoicing in their prosperity, or being affected with their distresses: this is far below what is required of a good man. We were all designed by our Creator to be parts of one body, members of one great society, where every one was to contribute his part towards the common benefit, and to be made happy by studying to make others so. In proportion indeed as our ability and influence extend, the obligation to be extensively beneficial also grows; but hardly is there any sphere so narrow and circumscribed, as not to afford some opportunities of being useful. — In thy humble and obscure station, thou art apt to think thyself entirely insignificant and lost to the world. To thee, indeed, it may not belong to heal the diseased, to raise the fallen, to supply the indigent, or to bring forward the deserving. But is there none whose spirit thou canst cheer, or whose infirmities thou canst help to lighten? Hast thou no parent, no child, no brother, no friend, to whom thou canst speak the words of comfort in the hour of sorrow, whose mistakes thou canst rectify, or whose erring steps thou canst turn into the right path?

Here let the example of Christ, as far as thy sphere admits it, be before thine eyes, to quicken thine activity, and animate thy zeal. The whole history of his life is the history of active and diffusive benignity. Wherever he was present, we find him employed in doing good; either relieving men from their distresses, or making them wise and happy by his instructions. The whole country around him seemed to be his family, and if in a literal sense he had been the father of them all, they could not have exercised his care, or shared his bounty more. The hungry were fed, and the sick were cured, the blind saw, and the lame walked, wherever he came. His miracles never were mere ostentations of power, but always expressions of goodness. Often he prevented the supplications of the distressed, and, unasked, conferred his favours; but never did any person apply to him for aid and relief without receiving it, whether he was Jew or Heathen, friend or foe. What is especially remarkable in his beneficence is, that it was continued and persevering in the midst of ingratitude. This is one of the hardest trials of virtue, not to be soured by the perversity of men, and which persons even of generous spirits find it the most difficult to bear. But though Christ had to deal with a most untoward and stubborn generation, whom no evidence could convince, and no goodness could mollify; though of all the great numbers who had been objects of his beneficence, we read of few who thankfully acknowledged his kindness, fewer who became his followers, and none who rose up to assert his cause when borne down by unjust persecution; yet, seeking to do good only for its own sake, he persevered to the last in unwearied beneficence. He *overcame evil with good*: it had been his principle, and, it would appear, a noted saying of his, which his disciples remembered and quoted after his death; *it is more blessed to give than to receive*.*

II. We ought to propose for imitation that humanity of manners,

* Acts, xx. 35.

that gentleness and affability which appeared in the whole of our Lord's behaviour. This relates to the manner of conferring benefits, which is often as material as the benefits themselves are. These are sometimes conferred so ungraciously, as to carry the air of insults, rather than benefits: whereas, when they bear the marks of proceeding from real kindness, their value is heightened, and they are received with double pleasure. There are numberless occasions, when the discovery of a humane temper, and the lesser offices of obliging and courteous behaviour, contribute essentially to the happiness of others, and supply the place of greater benefits, which may not be in our power to bestow. — For this amiable spirit, our Lord was remarkably distinguished. He was open and affable to all, and easier of access than his own disciples. On different occasions, we find him checking his disciples, when they restrained the forwardness of the multitude who pressed upon him, seeking relief. Nay, he rebuked them for forbidding little children to come to him, whom the fondness of the parents sought to introduce to his presence. He took the children into his arms and blessed them, and propounded them to his disciples as emblems of that innocence and simplicity which are requisite for our entering into the kingdom of heaven.* — He conversed familiarly with all sorts of people, and readily answered the questions they put to him. He had nothing of that haughty and distant reserve, which we so often see maintained by men of the world, and which prevents them from holding intercourse with any whom they consider as their inferiours in reputation or in rank. On the contrary, as our Lord was ready to do good to all, so he disdained not to receive kindness from others; complying cheerfully with the desire of those who invited him to their houses, and accepting in good part the proffered tokens of their well-intended respect. For such instances of courtesy, he was reproached by the Jews, as one who wanted that external severity of manners which they imagined to belong to a professed reformer of the world. But He, who knew what was in the heart of man, saw that gentleness and condescension were more effectual methods of gaining men over to goodness, than harshness and austerity; and therefore did not decline all conversation with men of doubtful or blemished lives, as long as there was any hope of making them better. It was indeed true, that he was, as they reproached him, a *friend to publicans and sinners*; for he was a friend to every one to whom he could do good. — At the same time, it is of importance to remark, that this benignity of our Lord's manners never betrayed him into the opposite extreme, never degenerated into that easiness of good-nature, which too often leads men to slide into the manners and habits of those with whom they converse, though they cannot approve of them. Wherever the interests of virtue were concerned, our Saviour was inflexibly firm. He boldly lifted up his voice, and testified against vice and corruption wherever he beheld them. He freely reproved the greatest men of the nation for their hypocritical and assumed shows of sanctity; and the civility, with which he was entertained in the house of a Pharisee,

* Mark, x. 14.

did not prevent him from inveighing severely against the vices of that sect in their own presence.*

III. We are to consider our Lord in the light of a faithful and affectionate friend, and his example as the pattern of all the offices that belong to virtuous friendship. The Apostles whom he chose for his intimate companions and friends, were men of honest and candid minds, and of great plainness and simplicity of character; men who, from real esteem, and from conviction of the truth of his mission, had become his followers, and who, notwithstanding the disadvantages of his fortune in the world, continued to follow him to the last. At the same time, together with those essential principles of worth, they had also great effects. They were most of them of timid and fearful disposition, of slow understanding, backward to apprehend spiritual things, and still prepossessed with the favourite prejudice of their nation, that the promised Messiah was to be a great conqueror, who was to rescue their country from foreign subjection, and raise it to empire and grandeur. — Among these men, our Lord passed all the hours of his private life, acting every part of an affectionate and faithful friend, commending, advising, and reproving with great sincerity, and at the same time with great tenderness. In his manner of living, he put himself perfectly on a level with them. Some of them he honoured with greater intimacy than others; but, like a prudent father in his family, he allowed none of them to affect superiority over the rest, and checked all that tended to rivalry among them. He never flattered them in their failings. He never soothed them with vain hopes. He never concealed the disagreeable consequences that would follow from adherence to his cause. Again and again he inculcated what they were backward and unwilling to believe concerning himself; and though the questions they put often discovered a degree of gross ignorance, he answered them all without passion or impatience, training them up by degrees to the events that were to happen after his decease, and to the high part they were destined then to act in the world.

How happy would it be for mankind, if more attention were given to this noble pattern of fidelity and complacency which ought to prevail among friends, and of the indulgence due to the failings of those who are, in their general character, worthy and estimable persons! This amiable indulgence he carried so far, that in one of the most critical seasons of his life, during his agony in the garden, when he had left his disciples for a short time, with a strict charge to watch till he should return, but upon his returning found them asleep, all the reproof which their negligence at so important a juncture drew from him, was no more than this, *What, could ye not watch with me for one hour?* † — Of the tenderness of our Lord's affections, and the constancy of his friendship, we have a very memorable instance, in that mixture of friendship and filial piety which he discovered during the cruelty of his last sufferings. It is recorded, that when he hung upon the cross, beholding John his beloved disciple, and Mary his mother, standing as spectators below, he said to

* Luke, xi. 37.

† Matt. xxvi. 40.

John, *Behold thy mother*; and to Mary, *Behold thy son*; thus committing his forlorn mother to the charge of his friend John, as the most sacred and honourable pledge he could leave him of their ancient friendship. The heart of his friend melted; and from that hour, we are told, *he took her home with him to his own house*. It is John himself who has recorded to us this honourable testimony of his master's friendship.*

IV. THE example of Christ holds forth for our imitation his steady command of temper amidst the highest provocations, and his ready forgiveness of injuries. Though he had revenge always in his power, he constantly declined it. On one occasion, when his disciples wished him to call down fire from heaven to punish the inhospitality of the Samaritans, *he turned and rebuked them, saying, Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of; for the Son of Man is not come to destroy men's lives, but to save them.*† When he was reviled, *he reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not*. The insults, which he often received from a brutal multitude, had no power to alter the meekness and generosity of his disposition: he continued to beseech and intreat them, when they sought to chase him away from amongst them. When they accused him of being in confederacy with evil spirits, he answered their injurious defamation only with mild and calm reasoning, that if he by means of *Satan did cast out Satan, his kingdom must be divided against itself, and could not stand*. At his trial before the High Priest, when he was most injuriously treated, and contrary to all law was, in face of the court, struck by one of the High Priest's officers, what could he spoken more meekly and reasonably than his return to this usage, at a time when all circumstances concurred to exasperate the spirit of an innocent man; *if I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou me?*‡—When his enemies were completing the last scene of their cruelty in putting him to death, all their barbarous usage and scurrilous taunts on that occasion provoked not one revengeful thought in his breast, nor drew from his lips one misbecoming expression; but, on the contrary, the last accents of his expiring breath went forth in that affectionate prayer for their forgiveness; *Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!*—Shall we, my friends, who have before our eyes such an example of generous magnanimity, of continued self-command amidst the most trying situations, not be ashamed of giving vent to passion on every trifling provocation, and fiercely demanding reparation for the smallest injury; we, who, from the remembrance of our own failings, have so many motives for mutual forbearance and forgiveness; while He, on the other hand, had done no wrong, had never given offence to any, but had the justest title to expect friendship from every human being?

V. LET us attend to the sympathy and compassion which our Lord discovered for the sufferings of mankind. It was not with a cold unfeeling disposition, that he performed the office of relieving the distressed. His manner of bestowing relief, clearly showed with what sensibility he entered into the sorrows of others. How affect-

* John, xix. 26, 27.

† Luke, ix. 55, 56.

‡ John, xviii. 23.

ing, for instance, is the account of his restoring to life the son of the widow of Nain, as it is related in the beautiful simplicity of the evangelical historian? *When he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother; and she was a widow; and much people of the city was with her.* All the circumstances in this incident are moving and affecting; and it presently appeared with what tender sensibility our Lord was touched at the sight of so mournful a procession. *And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not; and he came and touched the bier, (and they that bare him stood still,) and he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise. And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak; and he delivered him to his mother.** The whole scene of raising Lazarus from the grave places our Saviour's sympathy in the strongest light. As soon as he came among the mourning friends, although he knew the cause of their mourning was speedily to be removed, he could not forbear partaking of their sorrow; *He groaned, and was troubled in spirit;* and when, surrounded by a crowd in tears, he approached to the grave of his deceased friend, it is expressly recorded, to the eternal honour of his feelings, *Jesus wept; and the Jews said, Behold, how he loved him.†*—In like manner, when, for the last time, he was about to enter into Jerusalem, though the certain knowledge of all the cruelties which were prepared for him there would have filled the breast of any ordinary person with indignation and hatred, instead of such emotions, the foresight of the direful calamities which hung over that devoted city melted his heart; and when he drew near to it and beheld it, *he wept: pouring forth that pathetic lamentation; O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the Prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not! If thou hadst known, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes.‡* Thus, as a man, he indulged all the amiable feelings of our nature, teaching us that it is our duty to regulate our passions, not to extirpate them.

SUCH was Jesus of Nazareth, the founder of our religion. A part only of his character I have now attempted to delineate: many other of his eminent graces and virtues have been left in the shade. But in what we have now contemplated of his behaviour as a man among men, we behold a perfect model of the conduct we ought to hold in the ordinary intercourse of society with one another. We have seen him attentive to every opportunity of being beneficent and useful; in his behaviour to all men, affable and obliging; to his friends, faithful and indulgent; to his enemies, generous and forgiving; to the distressed, full of tenderness and compassion. I might also have dwelt upon the peaceable spirit he displayed on all occasions; his respect, as a subject, to the civil laws and government of his country; discouraging a factious and mutinous spirit; paying tribute when demanded; exhorting his followers to render unto Cesar the things which are Cesar's, as unto God those which are God's. Enough

* Luke, vii. 12—13.

† John, xi. 35, 36.

‡ Luke, xiii. 34.—xix. 42.

has been said to show what a blessing it would prove to the world, if this illustrious example were generally followed. Men would then become happy in all their connexions with one another. This world would be a blessed dwelling; and the society of human beings on earth, would approach to the joy and peace of the societies of the just in heaven.

SERMON LXXV.

ON THE WOUNDS OF THE HEART.

Prov. xviii. 14.

The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity: but a wounded spirit who can bear?

THERE are two classes of goods and evils belonging to man; those which respect his corporeal, and those which respect his spiritual state. Whatever is of an external nature, is sufficiently the object of attention to all men. In the health and vigour of the body, and in the flourishing state of worldly fortune, all rejoice; and whatever diminishes the one or the other, is immediately felt and lamented. These are visible and striking objects, on which our senses and imagination are accustomed to dwell. But to procure an equal attention to what is inward and spiritual, is much more difficult. It is not easy to convince men that the soul hath interests of its own, quite distinct from those of the body, and is liable to diseases and wounds as real as any which the body suffers, and often much more grievous. What passes within the hearts of men, is always invisible to the public eye. If it be of the pleasing and satisfactory kind, they have no occasion to disclose it; and if it be of a painful nature, it is often their intent to conceal it. In the mean time, *the heart knoweth its own bitterness* and from its being secreted from public observation and concentrated within the breast, it is felt the more deeply. — *The spirit of a man will sustain his infirmity*; the natural vigour and courage of his mind may enable him to surmount the ordinary distresses of life; to bear with patience poverty, sickness, or pain, as long as he is conscious that all is right and sound within. But if, within him, the disease rankles in his mind and his heart; if that which should sustain him serves only to gall and torment him; to what quarter can he then look for relief, or to what medicine apply, when that which should have cured his other wounds is itself diseased and wounded? *A wounded spirit who can bear?*

THE spirit or soul of man is wounded chiefly by three causes: by Folly, by Passion, by Guilt.

I. It is wounded by Folly; that is, by vain, light, and improper pursuits; by a conduct, which though it should not be immediately criminal, yet is unsuitable to one's age, character, or condition in the world. Good sense is no less requisite in our religious and moral

behaviour, than it is in our worldly affairs. Whoever departs far from the plain track of sober and reasonable conduct, shall, sooner or later, undergo the consequences of a diseased and wounded spirit. — It often happens, that under the notion of innocent pleasure and amusement, of only following their humour and indulging their taste, while, as they say, they hurt no man, and violate no material duty, many go on, for a time, in a course of the most egregious follies, and all along conceive themselves to be, if not very virtuous, at least very inoffensive men. The case is the same with the diseases of the mind, as with the diseases of the body. They lurk for a time unperceived. The seeds of them may be working within, while the person affected imagines himself to be in perfect health; but at length a crisis comes, which brings the secret venom forth, and makes all its malignity be felt.

In this age of dissipation and luxury in which we live, how many avenues are constantly open that lead to the Temple of Folly? To how many temptations are all, but especially the young and the gay, exposed, to squander their whole time amidst the circles of levity, and haunts of pleasure? By idleness and extravagance, and the vain ambition of emulating others in the splendid show of life, multitudes run into expence beyond their fortune. The time which should be employed in training them for future significance in the world, they lose in frivolous amusements and pursuits; or, in the midst of these, bury the fruits of any good education they had already received. Idle associates are ever at hand, to aid them in inventing new plans of destroying the time. If that fatal engine of mischief, the gaming-table, then attracts and ensnares them, their career of folly will soon be completed; the gulf of destruction opens, and ruin is at hand.

Supposing some incident to befall, as befall at some time it must, which shall awaken persons of this description from their dreams of vanity; which shall open their eyes to the time that they have mispent, and the follies which they have committed; then, alas! what mortifying and disquieting views of themselves will arise? How many galling remembrances will crowd upon their minds? They see their youth thrown away in dishonourable or trivial pursuits; those valuable opportunities which they once enjoyed, of coming forward with distinction in the world, now irretrievably lost; their characters tarnished and sunk in the public eye; and the fortune, perhaps, which they had inherited from their ancestors, wasted among idle companions. They behold around them the countenances of their friends, angry and displeased. To the grave and the respectable, they dare not look up. They, with whom they once started in the race of life as their equals, have now got far before them; they are obliged to respect them as their superiours, and with shame to view themselves left behind, disgraced and dishonoured. — Can any situation be more humbling and mortifying than this? Is not this to suffer in a high degree the misery of a wounded spirit, when a man sees that, by mere thoughtlessness and folly, he has exposed and degraded himself; beholds his character, his health, his interest, sinking in the world; and is sensible that with his own hands, and by his own blind

and ill-judged conduct, he has brought this ruin on himself?—Conscience now begins to exert its authority, and lift its scourge. At every stroke it inflicts, the wounds of the heart open and bleed: and though it exercise not the same dread severity as when it upbraids us with notorious crimes, yet still it is the voice of God within, rebuking and punishing reasonable creatures for folly as well as for guilt; nor indeed are follies of such a kind as have been described, ever free from many stains of guilt.

II. *By Folly* the spirit is thus liable to be wounded, it is exposed by *Passion* to wounds still more severe. Passions are those strong emotions of the mind which impel it to desire, and to act, with vehemence. When directed towards proper objects, and kept within just bounds, they possess an useful place in our frame; they add vigour and energy to the mind, and enable it, on great occasions, to act with uncommon force and success; but they always require the government and restraint of reason. It is in the mind, just as it is in the body. Every member of the body is useful, and serves some good purpose. But if any one swell to an enormous size, it presently becomes a disease. Thus, when a man's passions go on in a calm and moderate train, and no object has taken an inordinate hold of any of them, his spirit is in this part sound, and his life proceeds with tranquillity. But if any of them have been so far indulged, and left without restraint, as to run into excess, a dangerous blow will then be given to the heart.—Supposing, for instance, that some passion, even of the nature of those which are reckoned innocent, shall so far seize a man as to conquer and overpower him, his tranquillity will be destroyed. The balance of his soul is lost; he is no longer his own master, nor is capable of attending properly to the offices of life which are incumbent on him, or of turning his thoughts into any other direction than what passion points out. He may be sensible of the wound. He feels the dart that is fixed in his breast, but is unable to extract it.

But the case becomes infinitely worse, if the passion which has seized a man be of the vicious and malignant kind. Let him be placed in the most prosperous situation of life; give him external ease and affluence to the full; and let his character be high, and applauded by the world; yet, if into the heart of this man there has stolen some dark jealous suspicion, some rankling envy, some pining discontent, that instant his temper is soured, and poison is scattered over all his joys. He dwells in secret upon his vexations and cares, and while the crowd admires his prosperity, he envies the more peaceful condition of the peasant and the hind. If his passions chance to be of the more fierce and outrageous nature, the painful feelings they produce will be still more intense and acute. By violent passions the heart is not only wounded, but torn and rent. As long as a man is under the workings of raging ambition, disappointed pride, and keen thirst for revenge, he remains under immediate torment. Over his dark and scowling mind, gloomy ideas continually brood. His transient fits of merriment and joy are like beams of light breaking, occasionally, from the black cloud that carries the thunder.—What

greatly aggravates the misery of such persons, is, that they dare make no complaints. When the body is diseased or wounded, to our friends we naturally fly; and from their sympathy or assistance expect relief. But the wounds given to the heart by ill-governed passions, are of an opprobrious nature, and must be stifled in secret. The slave of passion can unbosom himself to no friend; and, instead of sympathy, dreads meeting with ridicule or contempt. — How intolerably wretched must the condition of Haman have been, when, before all his assembled friends, he was reduced to make this humbling confession of his state; that, in the height of royal favour, and in the midst of the utmost magnificence and grandeur, “all availed him nothing, so long as he saw his rival, Mordecai the Jew, sitting at “the King’s gate!”

III. THE wounds which the heart receives from Guilt are productive of still greater pain and misery, than any which have been already mentioned. If beyond being misled by folly, or overcome by passion, a man be conscious to himself of having deliberately committed deeds of injustice or cruelty; of having, perhaps, by wicked arts, seduced the innocent and unwary, to fall the miserable victims of his licentious pleasures; of having ruined, by his dishonesty, the unsuspecting trusting friend; of having amassed wealth to himself, by fraud and oppression, from the spoils of the industrious: in such and similar cases, deep and lasting is the sting which is sent into the heart.

I am aware of the arts which have been devised by criminal men to shelter themselves from the attacks of conscience; of the sceptical principles to which they have recourse; and of the self-deceiving opinions with which they flatter themselves concerning their own character, concerning the goodness of God, and the allowances which they hope will be made for human infirmity and strong temptations. But all those palliatives of guilt are no other to the soul, than the empiric medicines that are applied to the diseases of the body; which disguise the disease, without removing it; which procure a little temporary ease, and conceal from the patient the danger of his state; but drive the distemper to the vitals, and make it break forth in the end with redoubled force. Thus may those dangerous opiates of conscience sooth a man for a while, in the days of his prosperity. Amidst the bustle of active life, and as long as the flutter of gay and youthful spirits lasts, he may go on in the commission of many crimes with smoothness and seeming peace. But let the sober and serious hour come, which, sooner or later, must come to all; let the amusements of life be withdrawn, and the man be left alone to his own reflections; the power of truth will soon prove too strong for all that is opposed to it, and pierce into his heart. — The voice of nature, of conscience, and of God, will make itself be heard within him. He will feel that he is a wretch. He will become despicable in his own sight. He will become sensible that all good men have reason to hate him, and that the just Governour of the world has reason to punish him. Conscience, bringing to remembrance all his secret crimes, will hold them up to his view with this fearful inscription written upon them, *God will bring every work into judgment.* — Hence

the haggard look, and the restless couch, days never free from bitterness, and nights given up to remorse.

This remorse will prey the deeper on the bad man's heart, if it shall happen, as it sometimes does, that there was a period in his life when he was a different man; when, having been educated by virtuous parents in sober and religious principles, and being as yet uncorrupted by the world, he passed his days without reproach or blame. The recollection of what he then felt, compared with the state into which he has now brought himself by forfeited integrity and honour, will wring his heart with sad remembrance. "Once I knew what it was to enjoy all the comforts of innocence, and to take pleasure in the thoughts of heaven, when my hands were unstained and my mind was pure. Then I was ever cheerful, easy, and free. Heaven and earth seemed to smile upon me. My nights were peaceful, and my days were pleasant. Innocent joys and comfortable hopes were ever at hand to entertain my solitary hours. — Where now are these gone? Why am I thus so altered and changed from what I was, and so uneasy to myself? What, alas! have I gained by those worldly pursuits and ambitious plans which seduced me from the plain and safe paths of integrity and virtue!"

SUCH are the wounds of the spirit, occasioned either by folly, by passion, or by guilt, and too often by a complication of all the three together. For though they be of separate consideration, and each of them may be felt in a different degree, yet they are seldom parted wholly asunder from one another. Folly gives rise to unrestrained and disorderly passions. These betray men into atrocious crimes; and the wretched sinner is stung as by a three-headed snake; at once, reproached by reason for his folly, agitated by some strong passion, and tortured with a conscious sense of guilt. — When these disorders of the mind arise to their height, they are, of all miseries, the most dreadful. The vulgar misfortunes of life, poverty, sickness, or the loss of friends, in comparison with them, are trivial evils. Under such misfortunes, a man of tolerable spirit, or of a moderate share of virtue, will be able to find some consolation. But, under the other, he can find none. What is but too decisive as to the degree in which they surpass all external evils, they are those wounds of the spirit, the shame of folly, the violence of passion, and the remorse for guilt, which have so frequently produced that fatal crime, so much the reproach of our age and our country; which have driven men to the most abhorred of all evils, to death by their own hand, in order to seek relief from a life too embittered to be endured. — Far from each of us be such desperate calamities! — But, if it be the certain tendency of those wounds of the heart, to introduce the greatest disquietude and misery into the life of man, then, from what has been said, let us be taught,

In the first place, To give the most serious and vigilant attention to the government of our hearts. It may be thought by some, that the formidable representation I have given of the miserable effects of a wounded spirit, attaches only to them who have gone to the utmost lengths in folly or passion; but that, by some more temperate regulation of conduct, indulgence may be given, without harm, to the

free gratification of certain favourite desires. — Be assured, my brethren, that, under ideas of this kind, there lies much self-deception. Supposing it in your power to stop at some given point without rushing into the greatest disorders, still you would suffer from the licence you had taken to drop the government of your hearts. The lesser criminal never escapes without his share of punishment. In proportion to the quantity you have drunk out of the poisoned cup of pleasure, you will feel your inward health and soundness impaired; or, to follow the metaphor of the Text, not by a deep wound only, but by every slighter hurt given to the heart, you will suffer in that peace and tranquillity which makes the comfort of life.

But besides this consideration, strict attention is the more requisite to the government of the heart, as the first introduction to those disorders which spread their consequences so deep and wide, is for the most part gradual and insensible, and made by latent steps. Did all the evil clearly show itself at the beginning, the danger would be less. But we are imperceptibly betrayed, and from one incautious attachment drawn on to another, till the government of our hearts be at last utterly lost; and wounds inflicted there, which are not to be healed without much shame, penitence, and remorse. — How much does this call for the attention of youth in particular, whose raw and unexperienced minds are so apt to be caught by every new and enticing object that is held forth to their passions? How much does it concern them to beware of the commencements of evil, and to listen to the admonitions of the grave and the wise, who have gone through those dangerous paths on which they are beginning to enter? Let them never give up their hearts profusely to any attachment, without the countenance of reason and religion. Let them shut their ears to the seductions of folly and vice, and look with wary eye to those rocks on which so many others have split. — Nor is it only to youth that this admonition belongs. To the levities and passions of youth succeed the more sober follies of advancing years; which, under a graver appearance, are no less liable to seize and wound the heart. From the first to the last of man's abode on earth, the discipline is perpetually requisite of *keeping the heart with all diligence*; guarding it from whatever would annoy its healthy and sound estate; as *out of the heart are the issues either of Life or Death*.

In the second place, It clearly appears, from what has been said, how much reason we all have to join prayer to Almighty God, in addition to our own endeavours of guarding and governing our spirits; beseeching Him who made the heart, and who knows all its errors and wanderings, to aid and prosper us by his grace in this difficult undertaking. Well must he who knows any thing of himself at all, know how greatly divine assistance is needed here, and how little we can depend upon ourselves without it. For *deceitful*, as well as *desperately wicked*, are our hearts; and after all our pretences to ability and wisdom, how often, by the seductions of folly and of passion, have the wise, the learned, and the admired, been shamefully carried away? — Most earnestly to be desired is that blessing promised in the Gospel, of a new heart and a new spirit, which shall

render us superiour to the attacks of vanity and vice. *Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me, O God, from secret faults: Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me. That which I see not, teach thou me; and lead me in thy way everlasting.*

IN the last place, All that has been said on the subject tends to impress us with a sense of this awful truth, that the Great God hath already begun to punish bad men for their sins and vices. You see his hand clearly marked in all that they are made to suffer by the Wounded Spirit. You see that he has not delayed all retribution to another world; but hath in this world begun to act as a Governor and a Judge; showing, by an established order of things, that while he loves the righteous, he *hateth all the workers of iniquity*. With a wisdom peculiar to himself, he hath made the punishments due to sinners to arise directly from their own behaviour, and to be inflicted by their own hands. He hath no occasion to send forth destroying angels against them; the thunder which is ever in his hands, needs not to be pointed at the heads of the guilty. He need only leave them to themselves; and presently their *wickedness begins to reprove them, and their backslidings to correct them*, till they fully see and feel what an *evil thing, and bitter it was, to depart from the Lord their God*. Conscious, while their hearts are bleeding within them, that they are only *reaping the fruit of their own doings*, the sense of deserving what they suffer, both aggravates the suffering, and forces them to acknowledge the justice of it.

When we behold such plain marks of wise and just government taking place among men, who shall take upon him to say that all things come alike to all men, and that there is no more than a promiscuous distribution of good and evil by Providence on earth? However it may seem in appearance, it is far from being so in reality. We look to the outside of things. We are dazzled with that tinsel glare which prosperity sometimes throws around the worthless and the wicked. But what is that to true happiness and self-enjoyment? often, how little connected with it? Could you look into the hearts of men, another scene would open. You would see many a heart wounded and bleeding in secret, from a guilty conscience and remembered crimes, while gay looks were affectedly put on before the world. Comparing this galled and distressed state of mind, with the free and easy, the light and disencumbered spirit of a worthy and virtuous man, even under the pressures of life, you would forbear to charge Providence, and would readily acknowledge, that though the external distribution of the world's goods be promiscuous, the internal allotment of happiness is measured by the real characters of men. — On the whole, let us hold fast by this great truth, and by it govern our lives, that every man's real happiness or misery is made, by the appointment of the Creator, to depend more on himself, and on the proper government of his mind and heart, than upon any external thing, or than upon all external things put together; that for those who serve God, and study to keep their conscience clear from guilt, God hath provided peace and comfort on earth, as well as rewards hereafter; but, *saith my God, there is no peace to the wicked*.

SERMON LXXVI.

ON ALL THINGS WORKING TOGETHER FOR GOOD TO THE
 RIGHTEOUS.

ROMANS, viii. 28.

*We know that all things work together for good to them that love God,
 to them who are the called according to his purpose.*

AMONG many ancient philosophers it was a favourite tenet, that all seeming disorders in the world are rendered subservient to the order and perfection of the universe; or, that all things work together for the good of the whole: But to this good of the whole, they conceived the interest of individuals to be oft-times obliged to yield. The revelation of the Gospel has opened to us a higher and more comfortable prospect. For it assures us not only of the direct tendency of all things to general order, but to the consummate happiness of every individual who loves and serves God. While the Deity is ever carrying on the general system of things to its proper perfection, the interest of no one good man is sacrificed in any point to promote this end; but his life is, at the same time, a system complete within itself, where all things are made to conspire for bringing about his felicity. *We know*, says the Apostle in my Text, that is, we are assured, not by doubtful reasonings with regard to which the wisest might be perplexed, but by a divine promise on which the simple can firmly rely, that *all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the Called according to his purpose*. — This is that capital encouragement of religion, which virtually contains in itself all the other promises made in Scripture to the righteous, and, like a full and exuberant fountain, divides itself into a thousand streams to refresh the life of man with consolation and joy. It will therefore deserve our very full and particular consideration, both as to the extent of encouragement given, and the evidence on which our assurance of it rests.

THE first thing which should here draw our attention is, the character of those to whom the encouragement of the Text is appropriated. For it is evidently not given indiscriminately to all, but limited to such as *love God*, and *are the Called according to his purpose*; that is, chosen by him to eternal life. But, lest the latter part of this description should appear too secret and mysterious to afford the encouragement intended, it is cleared up by the first and explanatory character, *them that love God*. Here is something plain and satisfactory, on which we can rest. We need not say, Who shall ascend into heaven, in order to bring us down from thence any information, whether our names be written in the book of life? It is sufficient to look into ourselves, and the state of our heart. *The word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.**

* Deut. xxx. 14.

They that *love God*, and they who are *the Called, according to his purpose*, are the same. Divine love is the sacred character which marks those who are *sealed unto the day of redemption*. — This love of God is not to be understood as signifying merely some occasional ardour of affection; it imports that steady principle of goodness which becomes the spring of a pure and virtuous life. The same character is here meant, which is described in other passages of Scripture, by *fearing and serving God*. They who truly love God, are they who love and imitate the divine perfections; they who love and obey the divine laws; they who love and pursue the divine approbation, as the great aim of their life. — Keeping this important article ever in view as a necessary limitation of the gracious declaration in the Text, let us proceed to examine the full extent of that encouragement which it affords.

WE begin with considering what the *good* is, for which it is here said that all things work in favour of the righteous. It is a term susceptible of very different acceptations. For many things appear good to some, which do not appear so to others; nay, the same things which have appeared to ourselves good at one time, have been far from appearing good at another. Assuredly that *good* which God promises as the reward of his servants, must be somewhat worthy of God to bestow; somewhat that depends not on the fluctuation of fancy and opinion, and that is not liable to change with the change of times. It must be some good of a fixed and permanent nature, which will be felt as such in every situation and period of our existence. But it is evident that such characters are not applicable to the external advantages of the world, riches, fame, and honours. These may occasionally be desirable, and at some times confer satisfaction on the possessor. But besides their uncertain and transient duration, they are far from conferring satisfaction, at all times, even when they last. On the contrary, it is a certain fact, and manifest to general observation, that a man may possess all the external advantages of fortune, and lead withal a very miserable life. Suppose him to be disquieted in his own mind by envy, jealousy, revenge, or other violent passions, and harassed with a guilty conscience, such a man cannot be said to have attained what *is good*. Would it have been worthy of the Supreme Being to have flattered his servants with the hope only of a good so fallacious, that in certain circumstances it might be consistent with the greatest misery? — No: that good, for the sake of which he makes all things work to those that love him, must be founded in the improvement and perfection of their nature in wisdom, grace, and virtue; in their good, considered as rational and immortal beings; productive of a felicity which is within them, and shall abide with them for ever. While we look only to a present momentary satisfaction, the Divine Being, in consulting our welfare, provides for the whole of our existence in time and eternity; connects the present with the future; and, by his beneficent decree, ordains for each of his servants, that which, upon the whole, is *the best*. — *While to the sinner he giveth*

*sore travail, to gather and to heap up; he giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy.**

HAVING ascertained the sense in which we are to understand *the good* for which God maketh all things to work, we proceed to consider what is included in the extent of the expression, of *all things working for this good*. In general, it includes all that happens to good men in this world; every station and condition in which they are placed; every circumstance in their lot, from the beginning to the end of their lives. Nothing befalls them fortuitously, nothing happens in vain, or without a meaning; but every event possesses its proper and destined place, and forms a link in that great chain of causes which is appointed to carry on their improvement and felicity. As all the rivers upon the face of the globe, however circuitous they may be in their progress, and however opposite in their course, yet meet at last in the ocean, and there contribute to increase the mass of waters; so all the seemingly discordant events in the life of a good man are made to preserve, upon the whole, an unerring tendency to his good, and to concur and conspire for promoting it at the last. What a noble and sublime view does this present of the supreme dominion of Providence, and of its care exercised over every righteous man!

When we descend to a more particular examination of what is included in the expression here used, of *all things*, we may observe, first, that it includes a state of worldly prosperity. For sometimes this is appointed to fall to the share of God's servants; nay, their worth and virtue have often been the means of bringing it about. But it is not one of those things which are good in their own nature, till God makes it work for that purpose. What numbers of men has it poisoned and destroyed, cherishing the growth of wantonness and folly; and implanting in their breasts the seeds of those bad passions which spring up into many a crime! From such evils, the prosperity of good men is guarded by God. The poison is extracted from it, and the salutary part only left. It is rendered to them a comfortable and useful enjoyment of life, affording opportunity for the exercise of many virtues, which otherwise would not have come within their sphere.

But, *among all things that work for good*, it is probable that the evils of this life were particularly designed to be included, as what we might have least expected to be subservient to that purpose. It is nevertheless certain, that, from the discipline of adversity, the most salutary improvements of human nature have been often derived. In that severe school, the predominant errors of the mind have been corrected, the intemperance of the giddy spirit has been allayed and reformed, and that manly seriousness acquired, which is the foundation of true wisdom. By the *sadness of the countenance, the heart of the sufferer has been made better*: he has been trained up to fortitude of mind, improved in humanity to men, and formed to the habits of devotion and resignation to God.

At the same time, it is only *if need be*, as the Apostle Peter speaks,

* Eccles. ii. 26.

that the righteous *are left for a season in heaviness*.* If it be certain that all things work for their good, it follows of course, that there is no superfluous severity, no needless or unnecessary trouble to them, in the constitution of things. Their afflictions never befall without a cause, nor are sent but upon a proper errand. These storms are never allowed to rise, but in order to dispel some noxious vapours, and to restore salubrity to the moral atmosphere. — Herein appears, if we may be allowed so to speak, the wonderful art and skill of the Supreme Artificer, the profound depth of the Divine wisdom, in extracting, from distresses and sorrows, the materials of peace and felicity. Nor are only the external calamities of good men subservient to this purpose; but their internal infirmities, their very failings and errors, are made, by the powerful influence of God's grace, to contribute ultimately to their good. They are thereby instructed in the knowledge of themselves; they are properly humbled by the discovery of their own weakness; and trained to that becoming spirit of contrition and returning repentance, which is represented as giving joy to the angels in heaven. He who *maketh the wrath of man to praise him*, is not deficient in wisdom and power, to make even the failings of his servants, in this imperfect state of human nature, redound at last to his own glory, and to their good.

It must not escape observation, that the Text suggests, not merely that all things prove good in the issue, or eventually turn out to the benefit of the righteous, but that they *work for it*. This expression carries particular energy. It imports that *all things* are so formed by God, as to become active causes of happiness to those who love him. His infinite wisdom gives to things in themselves most unapt, an aptitude and fitness to fulfil his own great ends; disposes and prepares them for their proper effects; and makes dangers and evils his instruments for accomplishing the felicity of his servants. There is a certain operation and process always going on, by which, though we are insensible of it, all things are constantly advancing towards a happy issue. In the same manner as the operation of natural causes, though slow and unperceived, is sure; as the seed which is sown in the ground is every moment unfolding itself; and though no eye can trace the steps of its progress, yet, with a silent growth, is ripening and shooting forth its stalks; so in the moral world, throughout all the dispensations of Providence, there is the same latent, but certain progress of the seeds of virtue and holiness, tending towards perfection in the end. *Light is sown for the righteous*, as the Psalmist beautifully employs this metaphor, *and gladness for the upright in heart*.†

It is said in the Text, not only that all things thus work, but that they *work together for good*; intimating that they are made to conspire and concur with one another, for bringing about what is best on the whole. Taken singly and individually, it might be difficult to conceive how each event wrought for good. They must be viewed in their consequences and effects; considered in all their dependencies

* 1 Pet. i. 6.

† Psalm xlvii. 11.

and connexions, as links hanging together to form one extensive chain. It is by adjusting into one consistent whole, the various events that fill up human life; arranging in the happiest succession all the occurrences of that complicated scene; and bending to his own purpose things which appear most opposite and contrary, that the Almighty accomplishes his great plan in behalf of those who *love him, and are the Called according to his purpose.*

SUCH is that great edifice of encouragement and hope, which the Gospel of Christ hath reared for the consolation of those who sincerely love and serve God. It remains now that we examine what the pillars are on which so mighty an edifice rests. The Apostle speaks, you see, in a strain of full assurance. He does not say, we believe, or we hope, but *we know*, that all things work together for good. — Let us consider,

IN the first place, The evidence in support of this doctrine, which arises from the perfections of the Divine nature. In general, that God is good to all, and that his goodness is especially exerted in behalf of the righteous, is a principle of religion which none will dispute. The only question is, how far that goodness extends, and whether we can conceive it as extending to all that is implied in the Text? Something, it must be confessed, there is astonishing, and on first view almost incredible in the assertion, that amidst that infinite combination of events which carry on the general order of the universe, nothing shall ever happen but what advances the happiness of each good man; and which shall tend to his private interest, as much as if his existence had formed a system by itself. But how astonishing soever this may seem to us, let us first reflect that this supposes no effort beyond the power of Him who is Almighty, or beyond the skill of Him who is infinite in wisdom. We must not measure divine operations by the feeble energies of man. God is the first cause of all that exists and acts. All events are, at every moment, in his hand. Nothing can make any resistance to his purpose, or fall out in any way beside, or beyond his plan. At one glance he perceives how all things are going on throughout his universe. Not the minutest object is overlooked by Him. No multiplicity of affairs distracts Him: for to the supreme intelligence, all things are present at once; and to the concerns of every good man, his observation and attention reach as fully as if there were no other object under his government.

As there is nothing, therefore, in the promise of the Text, which Divine power and wisdom cannot effect, so neither is there any thing in it but what Divine goodness gives us reason to believe shall be fulfilled. The goodness of the Supreme Being is very different from that of men. Among them, it is a principle occasionally operating, but always limited, and always subject to alteration and change. Their benefits, though liberally bestowed at one time, will at another time be stopped by the intervention of contrary passions. Their benevolence decays; selfishness and indifference succeed. But, in the nature of the Deity, there is no principle which can produce alteration or change in his benevolent purpose once formed. *With-*

out variableness or shadow of turning, whom he hath once loved he loveth to the end. The gifts and calling of God are without repentance,†* His goodness therefore consists, not in a mere temporary effusion of blessings, but is permanent and steady; leading him, not simply to bestow some things that are good, and then to stop, but to carry his gracious purpose to the utmost; in every instance to do what is best for his servants on the whole, or, in the words of the Text, to make *all things work for their good*.

Let us now consider, what it would import, if any single occurrence were to happen in the course of human affairs, which had not a good design; which did not, in one form or other, promote the benefit of the righteous. What would it import, but that in such an instance, either the Divine power and wisdom had fallen short of their effect, or the Divine goodness had neglected and forsaken the virtuous? It were blasphemous to suppose that the nature of the Deity was changed; or that there were, in his government of the world, some vacant spaces, or neglected intervals, in which he suffered the reins of administration to drop out of his hands, and some evil principle to counteract his general system. But as all such suppositions are manifestly inconsistent with the nature of that God in whom Christians believe, there appears to follow, from the consideration of his perfections, evidence next to demonstration, for the truth of that doctrine which the Text contains.

BUT that it may not rest its evidence on our own reasonings only, let us next consider what discovery of his high designs God hath been pleased to make in the Revelation of the Gospel. Here it is amply sufficient to have recourse to one signal dispensation of his government, the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. Hence arises an argument which carries the most convincing force; and which accordingly, in a few verses after the Text, is employed by the Apostle in support of that doctrine I have been illustrating. *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also, freely give us all things?* — Can we in any instance distrust Him who hath given us this highest proof of his love? If he scrupled not to bestow this best gift, is there any other blessing he will be inclined to withhold? Having already done so much, will he leave incomplete his own great work? — By the death of Christ, we are taught in Scripture, that atonement was made for sin. He underwent in his sufferings the punishment due to us. He is said to have been *wounded for our transgressions, and bruised for our iniquities; to have borne our sins in his own body on the tree*. From this view of the doctrine of redemption, it naturally follows, that Christ, having purchased for his followers the pardon of their sins, the afflictions they now undergo are not properly to be considered as punishments, but as chastisements intended for their good. — Add to this, that it is the peculiar province of our Lord in his present exalted state, to administer all things for the good of his church. For this end his regal power is employed. To this end his mediation and intercession are directed; and either these must in some cases prove ineffectual,

* John, xiii. 1.

† Rom. xi. 29.

or it must follow that all things work for the good of them who love him. As much evidence then as we have for those capital truths on which the whole of Christianity rests, the same we have for that high encouragement afforded by the Text.

It remains to take notice, in the last place, of the express and multiplied promises of the sacred Scripture to the same purpose with that in the Text. Though the Text alone might have appeared sufficient for our encouragement; yet, as repeated assurances of the same thing come home with greater weight to the mind, it hath pleased God to make this full provision for confirming the trust and hope of his servants; and there can be no doubt that the plain and explicit words of the divine promises have had the most comfortable influence on many who could not so well have supported themselves under the trials of life, either by reasonings taken from the divine perfections, or by inferences drawn from the doctrine of redemption. Accordingly, we are not left merely to reason or to infer, but are in express terms told by God himself, that *godliness shall be profitable unto all things; that God the Lord is a sun and a shield, giving grace and glory, and withholding no good thing from them that walk uprightly; that no evil shall happen to the just; for the Lord is their keeper, who never slumbers nor sleeps; that his eyes are ever on the righteous; that when they pass through the waters, he will be with them, and through the rivers they shall not overflow them; and in fine, that all his paths are mercy and truth to such as fear him, and keep his covenant.** These promises, and many more to the same effect, with which the Scripture abounds, plainly express a particular care of Heaven exercised about every single good man; they signify as real an interposition of Providence, as if the laws of nature had been suspended on his account.

The opinion entertained by some, that the Providence of God extends no farther than to a general superintendence of the laws of nature, without interposing in the particular concerns of individuals, is contrary both to reason and to Scripture. It renders the government of the Almighty altogether loose and contingent, and would leave no ground for reposing any trust under its protection. For the majority of human affairs would then be allowed to fluctuate in a fortuitous course, without moving in any regular direction, and without tending to any one scope. The uniform doctrine of the sacred writings is, that throughout the universe nothing happens without God; that his hand is ever active, and his decree or permission intervenes in all; that nothing is too great or unwieldy for his management, and nothing so minute and inconsiderable as to be below his inspection and care. While he is guiding the sun and the moon in their course through the heavens; while in this inferiour world he is ruling among empires, *stilling the ragings of the waters and the tumults of the people*, he is at the same time watching over the humble good man, who, in the obscurity of his cottage, is serving and worshipping Him. In order to express this vigilance of Providence in the strongest terms, our Saviour himself has said, that the very *hairs of our head are all*

* 1 Tim. iv. 8. Psalm lxxiv. 11. — cxi. 3, 4, &c.

numbered by God, and that while two sparrows are sold for a farthing, not one of them falls to the ground without his pleasure. The consolation which this affords, he applies to his disciples in what follows: *Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows.** It is on this doctrine of a special and particular Providence, he grounds that exhortation against worldly solicitude and anxiety, which accords so fully with the argument we have been pursuing; *your heavenly Father knoweth what things ye have need of; take therefore no thought for the morrow; but seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.†*

THUS it has been shown on what grounds our assured belief rests of the declaration in the Text, that all things are made to work for the good of the righteous. It is not a promise which admits of ambiguity, and which we might be afraid to interpret to its full extent. It is on every side confirmed by the most sober reasonings we can form from the divine perfections; by the whole tenour of the dispensation of redemption; by many repeated assurances given us in the sacred writings.

THE great objection, I am aware, that will be started by many against the whole of what has been advanced in this Discourse, is founded on the seeming prevalence of evil and disorder in the world. This, it will be said, is so conspicuous, as to be inconsistent with the representation that has been given of a Supreme Being, who attends, in every instance, to the welfare of every good man. The present state of the world may be suspected to carry more the appearance of a conflict between two opposite principles of good and evil, who divide the empire of the world, and of course create a mixture of some good things with more that are evil. How often, it will be said, are the best men insensible of any such gradual improvement, or any such tendency in the general course of things, as has been represented, to promote their interest; but on the contrary, left comfortless and forlorn, in the midst of surrounding prosperous vice, to mourn over disappointed hopes and bitter sorrows, without receiving the least mark of favourable intentions from Heaven? Hence the exclamations they have often uttered; "Where is the Lord, and where the sceptre of righteousness and truth? Doth God indeed see, and is there knowledge in the Most High? Or hath He forgotten to be gracious, and in anger shut up his tender mercies?"

Now, in answer to such objections, let us consider how much reason there is for ascribing those dark and doubtful appearances, to the narrow and confined views which our state allows us to take. The designs of the Almighty are enlarged and vast. They comprehend not only the whole of our present existence, but they include worlds unknown, and stretch forwards into eternity. Hence much darkness and mystery must of course rest at present on the administration of God; and we, who see only so small a portion of a great and complicated system, must be very inadequate judges, both of the tendency of each part, and of the issue of the whole. We behold no more than the outside of things. Our views glide over the surface;

* Matt. x. 31.

† Matt. vi. 32—34.

and even along that surface, they extend but a short way. But under the surface there lie hidden springs, that are set in motion by a superior hand, and are bringing forwards revolutions unforeseen by us. There are *wheels moving within wheels**, as the prophet Ezekiel beheld in mysterious vision. — We, measuring all things by the shortness of our own duration, are constantly accelerating our designs to their period. We are eager in advancing rapidly towards the completion of our wishes. But it is not so with God. In his sight, *a thousand years are as one day*: and while his infinitely wise plans are continually advancing with sure progress, that progress to our impatience appears slow. Let us have patience for a while, and these plans shall in due time be developed, and will explain themselves. His language to us is, *What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter*.†

Let us attend to the analogy of Nature. We shall find it to hold very generally, both in the moral and natural world, that nothing arises suddenly to the perfection of its state; that all improvement is carried on by leisurely gradations; and that most frequently it is through harsh and unpromising beginnings, things are brought to a favourable conclusion. This might be illustrated by many examples. — Take, for one instance, the progress of the seasons. Who that for the first time beheld the earth, in midst of winter, bound up with frost, or drenched in floods of rain, or covered with snow, would have imagined that Nature, in this dreary and torpid state, was working towards its own renovation in the spring? Yet we by experience know that those vicissitudes of winter are necessary for fertilizing the earth; and that under wintry rains and snows lie concealed the seeds of those roses that are to blossom in the spring; of those fruits that are to ripen in summer; and of the corn and wine, which are, in harvest, to make glad the heart of man. We perhaps relish not such disagreeable commencements of the pleasing season. It would be more agreeable to us, to be always entertained with a fair and clear atmosphere, with cloudless skies, and perpetual sunshine: while yet, in such climates as we have most knowledge of, the earth, were it always to remain in such a state, would refuse to yield its fruits; and, in the midst of our imagined scenes of beauty, the starved inhabitants would perish for want of food. — Let us therefore quietly submit to Nature and to Providence. Let us conceive this life, of whose evils we so often complain, to be the winter of our existence. Then the rains must fall, and the winds must roar around us. But, sheltering ourselves, as we can, under a good conscience, and under faith and trust in God, let us wait till the spring arrive. For a spring, an eternal spring, awaits the people of God. In the new heavens and the new earth, no storms shall any more arise, nor any displeasing vicissitudes of season return. It shall then at last appear how former sufferings have produced their proper effect; how the tempests of life have tended to bring on an everlasting calm; in fine, *how all things have wrought together for good to them that love God, and who are the Called according to his purpose*.

* Ezek. x. 10.

† John, xiii. 7.

SERMON LXXVII.

ON THE LOVE OF OUR COUNTRY.

[Preached 18th April, 1793, on the day of a National Fast appointed by Government, on occasion of the War with the French Republic.]

PSALM CXXii. 6, 7, 8, 9.

Pray for the peace of Jerusalem; they shall prosper that love thee. Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces. For my brethren and companions' sake, I will now say, Peace be within thee. Because of the house of the Lord our God, I will seek thy peace.

It is one of the infirmities belonging to human nature, that continued enjoyment of the highest blessings is apt to depreciate them in our esteem. This unhappy weakness shows itself, not only with respect to the light of the sun, and the beauties of nature, which we have been long accustomed to behold, but also with respect to health, peace, religion, and liberty. Let any one of those blessings have been long familiar to us; let a tract of time have effaced the remembrance of the distress which we suffered from the want of it; and it is surprising how lightly men are ready to prize the degree of happiness which they continue to possess. — In the midst of that peaceful and secure state which the inhabitants of this land have long enjoyed; surrounded with the chief blessings that render life comfortable; how few have any just sense of the gratitude they owe to Heaven for such singular felicity? Nay, is it not much to be lamented that there should have sprung up among us an unaccountable spirit of discontent and disaffection, feeding itself with ideal grievances and visionary projects of reformation, till it has gone nigh to light up the torch of sedition? — When government has now, for wise and proper reasons, called us together in a religious assembly, our thoughts cannot be more suitably employed, than in reviewing the grounds on which, as good Christians and faithful citizens, we have reason to entertain the warmest affection for our native country, and to put a just value on that constitution of government, civil and sacred, under which it is placed. — In the words of the Text, you see with what zeal the heart of the pious Psalmist glowed for the prosperity of his country. By the accumulation of expressions which he employs, and the variety of topics he suggests, you see the fervour with which this subject animated his heart. — It will be proper to consider, first, the grounds on which love for our country rests; and next, the duties to which this affection naturally gives rise.

BUT, before entering on any of those topics, it may be proper to take notice of the speculations of some pretended philosophers, who represent the love of our country as hardly entitled to any place among the virtues. They affect to consider it as a mere prejudice of education; a narrow attachment, which tends to operate against more enlarged interests. We ought, say they, to view ourselves as citizens

of the world, and extend our benevolence, equally, to all nations and all mankind. — Nothing can be more empty and futile than such reasonings. The wisdom of our Creator hath linked us by the ties of natural affection, first to our families and children; next to our brothers, relations, and friends; then to our acquaintance, and to the several societies and communities to which we belong. By instincts implanted in our nature, He has formed our hearts to enter readily into their interests; and has thus directed our benevolence to act primarily within that sphere, where its exertions can be most powerful and most useful. It is evident, that by acting on this plan, the general welfare is promoted in a much higher degree, than if our social affections had no particular direction given them, but were to float, as it were, in empty space, without any more determined object on which to act, than the whole human race, where they never could act with any effect. He who contends that he is not bound to have any more concern for the interests of Great Britain, than for those of France, or any other country, ought to hold, on the same grounds, that he is under no obligation to consult the welfare of his children and family, his brothers and friends, more than that of the most distant stranger; being equally connected, as he holds, with all, by the common brotherhood of the human race. It is much to be suspected, that this wonderful extensive philanthropy is only the language of those who have no affections at all; or perhaps, that it is the language assumed by some, who, bearing in their hearts a secret preference to the interests of another country above their own, but a preference which they choose not to avow, affect to cover it under this disguise, of a liberal, enlarged spirit.

Let us, my friends, disclaiming all such refinements of false philosophy, and following the dictates of plain good sense, and natural affection, resolve to love our native country, and in every proper way to show our attachment to it. This was the spirit which so honourably distinguished patriots, heroes, and legislators of old, and has transmitted their names with veneration to posterity; while they who felt no affection for the country to which they belonged, or who were treacherous to its interests, have been stigmatized with infamy among all civilized nations. I admit that there have been occasions, on which attachment to a particular country has been pursued to a very unjustifiable length. Wherever it has led the natives of one country to state themselves as enemies to the rest of mankind, and to endeavour at aggrandizing themselves by ruining all around them, the pretended love of their country is then become no other than a conspiracy against all other nations, and, instead of being a virtue, is the offspring of ambition, pride, and vanity.

I pressed now to show the just grounds on which it becomes us to be zealous for the welfare of that happy island, to which we have the honour and the blessing to belong. Let us consider our native country in three lights; as the seat of private enjoyment and happiness; as the seat of true religion; as the seat of laws, liberty, and good government.

As the seat of all our best enjoyments in private life. There,

my brethren, after we first drew breath, was our tender infancy reared with care; there, our innocent childhood sported; there, our careless youth grew up amidst companions and friends; there, our dearest connexions were formed; there, after having passed the happiest years of our life, we look forward for our old age to rest in peace. — These are circumstances which endear, and ought to endear a home, a native land, to every human heart. If there be any names known among men that awaken tender sentiments in the breast, the names of father, mother, spouse, child, brother, sister, or friend, these all recal our thoughts to our native land, and cannot, even in idea, be separated from it. When we name our own country, we name the spot of the earth within which all that is most dear to us lies. To be long absent from it, is a circumstance of distress; but to be excluded from the hope of ever returning to it, sinks the spirits of the worthy and the brave into extreme depression. Its very dust appears to them to be precious. Its well-known fields, and mountains, and rivers, become, in their eyes, a sort of consecrated ground; the remembrance of which often touches the heart with sensations of more tender joy, than can be raised by scenes more rich, and objects more splendid, in any foreign land.

These are feelings, which nature, or rather the God of nature, has implanted in the mind of man; and base and vile is he who studies to erase them, intimately connected as they are with our very best affections. — Can we think, my friends, how long we have sat *under our vine and our fig-tree*, in peace and joy, encircled by our families and friends, in that happy land we possess; and, with this pleasing remembrance dwelling on our minds, can we think with indifference of any danger which threatens the welfare of that country which has been the mother, the nurse, the guardian of us all? Can we think, without horror, of foreign invasion laying waste our fruitful and smiling fields, or of lawless anarchy and tumultuary mobs attacking our peaceful habitations? — No! *Peace be within thy walls, and prosperity within thy palaces*, will ever be the earnest prayer of every virtuous man; *for my brethren and companions' sake, I will ever say, Peace be within thee!*

II. We love our country as the seat of true religion. Freed from the dominion of Popish superstition and darkness, which so long overspread the earth, here the light of the blessed reformation continues to shine in its greatest splendour. Here the forms of religious worship are unencumbered with no pageantry of vain rites; but, agreeably to God's word, are plain and simple, yet solemn and venerable. Religion has among us neither been the engine of ecclesiastical tyranny, nor the instrument of princely despotism. It has maintained a proper alliance with the regular government of the state, and the order of public tranquillity. The church that has been established by law, in the two separate divisions of the island, is suited to the genius and dispositions of the people in each. While to the established church is given that protection and support from government, which both the interests of religion and the welfare of the state render proper and due; yet no rigid conformity to it is exacted. All persecution for

conscience sake is unknown. They who, in their modes of thinking, or in their religious forms, differ from the established church, are at full liberty, without reproach, to worship God according to their own opinions and the rites of their fathers, as long as they infringe not the public tranquillity nor disturb the state.

I now ask, What establishment of religion more friendly to public happiness could be desired or framed? How zealous ought we to be for its preservation? How much on our guard against every danger which threatens to trouble or overthrow it? — Can there be any among us so infatuated, as to wish to exchange it for that new form of things which has produced such fatal effects on a neighbouring land? Were it ever to be introduced among us, it is not the return of ancient superstition, it is not the bondage of the church of Rome, we would have to dread evils great in themselves, but small in comparison of what such a revolution would produce. As soon as under the guise of philosophy, and with the pretence of unlimited toleration, the established forms of religion were demolished in France, the flood-gates were opened to pour a torrent of avowed infidelity, atheism, and all the grossest immoralities, over that devoted country. We have beheld the throne and the altar overthrown together; and nothing but a wretched ruin left, where once a stately fabric stood. We have seen the venerable ministers of religion, stripped of their subsistence, torn from their churches, driven from their homes, and forced to wander as exiles, and beg their bread in a foreign land. — We have seen the last consolation of the wretched destroyed, and the grave sealed against their hope, by the public declaration that death is an eternal sleep. — Such have been the blessed fruits of that new order of things which boasted of being to restore happiness to all the nations. Such are the consequences we have to expect among ourselves, if ever the like dangerous opinions shall prevail in Britain. — With horror let us turn away from the thought. With earnestness let us *pray for the peace of our Jerusalem; and for the house of the Lord our God, let us zealously seek its good.*

III. We love our country as the seat of liberty and laws; a mild, wise, and happy government. This opens a much wider field of discourse, than the bounds of a sermon admit. But on this part of the subject being happily anticipated by so many excellent publications which have lately appeared, I shall content myself with making a few leading observations. — The ends for which men unite in society and submit to government are, to enjoy security to their property, and freedom to their persons from all injustice or violence. The more completely those ends are obtained, with the least diminution of personal liberty, the nearer such government approaches to perfection. I say, approaches to it; for a perfect government is a mere chimera. Before we can expect it to take place, we must wait till we see any one thing whatever arrive at perfection on earth. The two extremes to be guarded against are, despotism, where all are slaves; and anarchy, where all would rule. The British government may appear at different periods, to have inclined sometimes to the one, and sometimes to the other of those

extremes. In its present state, it may justly be accounted to be removed to an equal distance from either of those evils; and therefore to have approached nearer to the perfection of social order, than any other government, ancient or modern. To this point it has arrived in the progress of ages, not in consequence of theories formed by speculative men, such as our modern reformers; but in consequence of experiments made, and trials undergone. Experience, that great parent of all, but especially of political, wisdom, taught a brave, generous, and high-spirited people, how to correct, by degrees, preceding evils, and to form the wisest plan for liberty and security. In this state we now find the British constitution. It stands among the nations of the earth, like an ancient oak in the wood, which, after having overcome many a blast, overtops the other trees of the forest, and commands respect and veneration. All foreigners look to it with wonder, and with envy, as the happiest system that ever was devised for uniting dignity in the magistrate and liberty in the subject, with protection and security to all. Justly may we challenge those who attempt to criticise it, to produce, from the annals of history, any example of such a multitude of men as the British subjects, held together in the bonds of civil society, under so few restraints, and with such full enjoyment of freedom as we possess: blessed too for a whole century past with a succession of princes, who made the laws of the land the rule of their government; blessed now with a Sovereign at the head of the empire, to whom faction itself cannot impute, throughout his long reign, any acts of tyranny, cruelty, or oppression; whose personal virtues and whose domestic conduct hold forth to the nation such a high example of piety, decency, and good order, as, if generally followed, would render all his subjects happy.

In opposition to such sentiments as I have now delivered in favour of the constitution of our country, we are called upon, by a certain set of men, to look to a republic as the glory of all governments. There, we are told, every man comes forth to act his part with vigour; and, by the exertion of his talents, has opportunities of rising to the highest distinction and power. — In reply to this, let it be observed, first, that there are no advantages claimed by a republic, but what under the British constitution are enjoyed to the full. On the exertion of any laudable and honourable talent whatever, no restraint is laid; no odious distinctions take place between the nobility and the people; no severe exclusive privileges are possessed by the former to the prejudice of the latter; but merit in every rank has the freest scope, and examples abound of persons rising by their talents from ordinary rank and humble birth to high distinction in the state.

But next, it may be boldly asserted, that of all the forms of government which have been established on the earth, the republican is attended with the greatest disadvantages to those who live under it. In a small state, where the people resemble the inhabitants of one family, the management of their concerns can more safely be carried on by their own joint counsels, without any supreme magistrate. But if government be extended over a large territory, and over numerous inhabitants of different orders and fortunes, it has

ever been found impossible to preserve any well-regulated balance of power under a republican constitution. It has ever been, and never can be any other, than a perpetual contest between oligarchy and democracy; between the rich and the poor; between a few popular leaders who aspire to the chief influence, and the unruly violence of a turbulent multitude. In such states an internal warfare of this kind has been almost always carried on, with such violent convulsions and party animosities, as have given rise to more miseries than have been suffered under any other form of government whatever. — To no purpose are quoted to us, the heroes of Greece and Rome. Amidst the agitations of popular government, occasions will sometimes be afforded for eminent abilities to break forth with peculiar lustre. But while public agitations allow a few individuals to be uncommonly distinguished, the general condition of the people remains calamitous and wretched. Under despotic governments, miserable indeed is the condition of those who are near the throne. But while they are often the sport, and the victims of capricious cruelty, the ordinary mass of the people, at a distance from the thunder of power, are left, for the most part, in their inferiour situations, unmolested. Whereas, under a multitude of popular governours, oppression is more extensively felt. It penetrates into the interior of families; and by republican tyranny the humble and obscure are liable to be as much harassed and vexed as the great and wealthy.

If any one doubt of those facts, let him look at the present state of the republic established in that country to which we have so often been unfortunately obliged to allude. He will there behold a memorable example set forth to the world; but an example, not for imitation, but for instruction and caution; an example, not of exploits to be copied, or of advantages to be gained, but of all the evils against which men, joined in society, ought to stand on their guard. He will behold the republican halls hung round with monuments of proscriptions, massacres, imprisonments, requisitions, domiciliary searches, and such other trophies of the glorious victory of republicanism over monarchical power. *O my soul, come not thou into their secret; into their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united; for their anger was fierce, and their wrath was cruel.**

ENOUGH has now been said to convince every reasonable subject of the British government, that he has good grounds for loving and respecting his country. It remains to point out the duties to which the love of our country gives rise. Though these branch out into many particulars, they may be comprised under two general heads; the duties which are required of us in our character as private men, and those which belong to us in a political capacity as subjects and citizens.

FIRST, As private men and Christians, let us cultivate those virtues which are essential to the prosperity of our country. The foundation of all public happiness must be laid in the good conduct of individuals; in their industry, sobriety, justice, and regular attention to the duties of their several stations. Such virtues are the sinews and

* Gen. xlix. 6, 7.

strength of the state; they are the supports of its prosperity at home, and of its reputation abroad; while luxury, corruption, venality, and idleness, unnerve the public vigour, disgrace the public character, and pave the way to general ruin. Every vice, however fashionable, that becomes prevalent, is the infusion of so much poison into the public cup; and in proportion to the degree of its prevalence, will the health and strength of the nation be impaired. Few of us by our arms, and fewer still by our counsels, can have influence in promoting that welfare of our country, which all profess to desire. But there is one sphere in which all of us can act as benefactors to it; by setting a good example, each in his own line, and performing a worthy and honourable part. *Righteousness will ever exalt a nation; and wickedness will be, first, the reproach, and then the ruin of every people.*

Among those virtues to which the love of our country calls us, let us not forget piety to God. Without a proper sense of religion, and a due acknowledgment of that supreme Power which rules among the kingdoms, no nation was ever found to prosper long. Let those sophistical reasoners, who would teach us that philosophy ought now to supersede the ancient prejudices of Religion, look to the history of those republics which they so highly admire, especially to the history of the Romans. They will there find, that, during the freest and most flourishing periods of the republic, the Romans were the most religious of all nations. The Senate at no time assembled, no Consul entered on his office, no great public measure was ever undertaken, without previous religious services, without prayers and sacrifice. After every victory, solemn thanksgivings were offered to the gods; and upon any defeat that was sustained, public humiliations and processions were decreed, in order to deprecate the displeasure of Heaven. That much superstition and folly entered into what they called religion, will be readily admitted; but still it implied reverence to a supreme Power in Heaven, which ruled all the affairs of men, and was entitled to their homage. Hence that sacred respect to an oath, as an inviolable obligation, which long distinguished the Romans; and historians have remarked, that when the reverence for an oath began to be diminished, and the loose epicurean system which discarded the belief of Providence to be introduced, the Roman honour and prosperity from that period began to decline. — These are things that belong to our admonition, on whom *the ends of the world are come.*

In the second place, As we would show our love to our country, let us join to the virtues of private men, those which belong to us in a political capacity as subjects and citizens. These must appear, in loyalty to our sovereign, in submission to the authority of rulers and magistrates, and in readiness to support the measures that are taken for public welfare and defence. Without regard to such duties as these, it is evident, not only that the state cannot flourish, but even that it cannot subsist. Accordingly they are strongly bound upon us by the authority of Scripture. *Let every soul be subject to the higher powers; whoever resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God.*

*For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience-sake.** Such passages as these, there is little danger of our misunderstanding at present, as if they enjoined a slavish submission to authority in things unlawful. This is by no means the extreme to which the spirit of the times points, or to which the nature of our civil constitution leads. The full opportunity that is given for the voice of the people being at all times heard, the freedom of discussion on all political matters that is allowed both in discourse and writing, is a sufficient guard against all approaches to unwarrantable stretches of power in the ruler, and to unlimited submission in the subject.

But while we duly value this high advantage of the liberty of the press and the freedom of political discussion, and when we behold it perpetually acting as a censorial check on all who are in power, let us beware, lest, abusing our liberty, we suffer it to degenerate into licentiousness. The multitude, we well know, are always prone to find fault with those who are set over them, and to arraign their conduct; and too often this spirit appears when public dangers ought to silence the voice of discontent, and to unite every heart and hand in the common cause. — The management of a great empire, especially in difficult times, is the conduct of an unwieldy and intricate machine, in directing the movements of which, where is the hand so steady as never to err? Instead of the violent censures which the giddy and presumptuous are so ready to pour forth, moderation in discussing matters of which they are very incompetent judges, would be much more wise and becoming. The art of government and legislation is undoubtedly the most nice and difficult of all the arts in which the human mind can be engaged; and where the greatest preparation of knowledge, experience, and ability are absolutely requisite to qualify men for the task. But in times when legislation is considered as a trade which every man is qualified to take up; when the manufacturer quits his loom, and the artizan lays down his tools, in order to contrive plans for reforming the state, and to constitute societies for carrying his plans into execution; what can be expected to follow from such a spirit, if it were to become prevalent, but the most direful confusion? — Were the rashness of some, whose intentions are innocent, the only evil to be dreaded, the danger would be less. But it is always to be apprehended, that the operations of such persons are directed by men who have deeper designs in view; who seek to embroil the state, in order to bring forward themselves; whose aim it is to rise into eminence, though it were on the ruins of public tranquillity and order. Let such men, if any such there be, consider well what the consequences may be, of fomenting the spirit of presumptuous innovation. It is a dangerous weapon which they attempt to wield. By the agitation which they raise among a blind multitude, they are giving impulse to the motions of a violent engine, which often discharges its explosions on the heads of those who first touched its springs.

• UPON the whole, let us, my brethren, be thankful that our grounds

of discontent, whether founded on real or imaginary grievances, are so few; and that, for so great a number of public blessings, we have reason to bless the God of Heaven. We live in a land of pure religion, of liberty, and laws, and under a just and mild government. However the opinions of men may differ about this or that political measure adopted by government, it may with confidence be said, that we have much reason to respect those rulers, under whose administration the empire, though engaged in a hazardous and expensive war, has all along continued to hold a high rank among the nations of Europe, and has attained to that flourishing state of commerce, opulence, and safety, in which we behold it at this day: insomuch that perhaps the greatest dangers we have to apprehend, arise from the jealousy with which rival nations behold our superiority at sea, and our wealth and strength at home. — Let our prayers ascend frequently to Heaven for the continuance of those blessings; for *the peace of our Jerusalem; for peace within her walls, and prosperity within her palaces*; and let the admonition of Scripture never be forgotten; *My son, fear thou God; honour the king; and meddle not with them that are given to change.**

SERMON LXXVIII.

ON A CONTENTED MIND.

2 KINGS, iv. 13.

Say now unto her, "Behold thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? Wouldst thou be spoken for to the King, or to the Captain of the Host?" And she answered, "I dwell among mine own people."

A pious and respectable woman of Shunem had exercised great hospitality to the prophet Elisha. In order to accommodate him in his various journeyings, she had caused a chamber to be built for him, adjacent to her house, where he might be furnished with all that, according to the simplicity of those times, was wanted for his entertainment. In the Text, the Prophet, by his servant Gehazi, acknowledges the obligations he lay under to this good woman for her care and attention; and being at that time in favour with the king of Israel, desires to know, whether, in return for her kindness, he should apply to the king, or the captain of the host, in her behalf, and procure advancement to her in rank and fortune. — Her answer bespeaks all the modesty of one who was satisfied and contented with her present lot. Without any affectation of uncommon virtue, or any haughty contempt of the Prophet's offers, she mildly replies, *"I dwell among mine own people."* "I dwell in the condition to which I was born; in my native land; among my original connexions, and persons of

* Prov. xxiv. 21. 1 Pet. ii. 17.

“my own rank; and living there in peace, I have no desires of aspiring to a higher rank.”

The temper of this worthy Shunamite, who could so properly set bounds to her desires, and enjoy her present condition with contentment, is what I now propose to your imitation. It stands in opposition to that restless and discontented spirit which so often sets men at variance with their condition in the world, makes them look with contempt on that state of life and sphere of action which Providence has allotted them; and encouraging every real or supposed discouragement to prey upon their minds, makes them pine for some change of fortune.

It is proper, however, to observe, that this moderation of spirit which I am now recommending, is not inconsistent with our having a sense of what is uneasy or distressing in our lot, and endeavouring, by fair means, to render our condition more agreeable. Entire apathy, or passive indifference to all the circumstances of our external state, is required by no precept of religion. What a virtuous degree of contentment requires and supposes, is, that, with a mind free from repining anxiety, we make the best of our condition, whatever it is; enjoying such good things as God is pleased to bestow upon us, with a thankful and cheerful heart; without envy at those who appear more prosperous than us; without any attempt to alter our condition by unfair means; and without any murmuring against the Providence of Heaven. — “In that state in which it pleased God to place me at my birth, I am ready to remain, as long as it shall be his pleasure to continue me there. He has placed me among my equals. Such comforts as he saw meet for me to possess, he has bestowed. These I shall study to improve; and by his kind Providence favouring my industry and application, I may hope they will be increased. In the mean time, I rest satisfied; and complain not. *I dwell among mine own people.*”

But if this acquiescence in our condition is to be considered as belonging to that contentment which religion requires, what becomes, it will be said, of that laudable ambition, which has prompted many boldly to aspire with honour and success far beyond their original state of life? — I readily admit, that on some among the sons of men, such high talents are bestowed, as mark them out by the hand of God for superiour elevation; by rising to which, many, both in ancient and modern times, have had the opportunity of distinguishing themselves as benefactors to their country and to mankind. But these are only a few scattered stars, that shine in a wide hemisphere; such rare examples afford no model for general conduct. — It is not to persons of this description that I now speak. I address myself to the multitude; to the great body of men in all the various walks of ordinary life. Them I warn of the danger of being misled by vanity and self-conceit, to think themselves deserving of a much higher station than they possess. I warn them, not to nourish aspiring desires for objects beyond their power of attaining, or capacity of enjoying; and thereby to render themselves unhappy in their present condition, and dissatisfied with all that belongs to it. — By this restless discontented

temper, I shall proceed to show that they incur much guilt, and involve themselves in great folly and misery.

FIRST, Discontent carries in its nature much guilt and sin. With this consideration I begin, because I am afraid that discontentment is commonly treated, in a religious view, more slightly than it deserves. A contented temper, we are apt to say, is a great happiness to those who have it; and a discontented one, we call an unlucky turn of mind; as if we were speaking of a good or bad constitution of body, of something that depended not at all on ourselves, but was merely the gift of Nature.—Ought this to be the sentiment, either of a reasonable man, or a Christian; of one who knows himself to be endowed with powers for governing his own spirit, or who believes in God and in a world to come? What, I beseech you, do all the risings of discontent within you import, but so much concealed rebellion against the government of that Supreme Being, who hath appointed your place in the world? When you repine at your state, as below what you deserved, do you not inwardly tax Him with injustice and partiality, for conferring his favours on others more unworthy of them, and leaving you neglected and humbled? By treating with contempt the blessings he allows to your state, do you not, in effect, tell him, that his blessings are not worthy of being enjoyed, and merit no thanks, because he does not give you more?—The outward expressions of such sentiments, you may suppress. You may affect to appear religious, by shows of reverence and homage; but such appearances deceive not God. Every habitually discontented person is, and must be, ill affected towards Him: nay, though he would wish to conceal it from himself, he is a secret blasphemer of the Almighty.

Besides impiety, discontent carries along with it, as its inseparable concomitants, several other sinful passions. It implies pride; or an unreasonable estimation of our own merit, in comparison with others. It implies covetousness, or an inordinate desire for the advantages of external fortune, as the only real goods. It implies, and always engenders, envy, or ill-nature, and hatred, towards all whom we see rising above us in the world. Dare we treat that as a slight infirmity, or a constitutional weakness merely, which imports some of the worst dispositions and passions of the human heart?—The discontented man is never found without a great share of malignity. His spleen irritates and sours his temper, and leads him to discharge its venom on all with whom he stands connected. He can act his part well, in no relation of life. In public affairs, and in private business, he is always given to fretfulness and complaint. While the man of contented mind, easy and happy in himself, is disposed for living well with others, and spreads around him that cheerfulness which he possesses; the restless discontented person is a troubler of the world; neither a good friend, nor a good neighbour, nor a good subject or citizen.

In the second place, As this disposition infers much sin, so it argues great folly, and involves men in many miseries. If there be any first principle of wisdom, it is undoubtedly this: the distresses that are removable, endeavour to remove: those which cannot be removed,

bear with as little disquiet as you can: in every situation of life there are comforts; find them out, and enjoy them. But this maxim, in all its parts, is disregarded by the man of discontent. He is employed in aggravating his own evils; while he neglects all his own comforts. — What is it to you, though others are supposed to be happier? Very possibly they are not so; for wide is the difference between being what the world calls prosperous, and being happy. You see no more than the imposing outside of glittering fortune; while, under that gaudy cover, there may be lurking many a bitter sorrow. — But supposing others to be in truth as happy as they seem to be, is there any reason, except mere viciousness of disposition, why their happiness should be a cause of your discontent and misery? Cannot you be at your ease in the shade, because others are basking in the sun? What is this but the unhappy art of extracting from objects that ought to be indifferent to you, materials for your own torment?

“Such reasonings as these,” says one, “may be specious and plausible; but what avail reasonings to set me at ease, who every day feel myself hurt and sore from the scorn of those above me; who am condemned to behold them shining in all the pomp and splendour of life; while I, through the injustice of the world, am left in obscurity to toil for a scanty subsistence?” — Accuse not the world, my brother. Imagine not, that it is entirely the injustice of the world which produces your unhappiness. The disease lies within yourself. It originates from your pride and self-conceit, joined with the false opinions you have allowed yourself to entertain of the distinctions of fortune. Those distinctions must take place in every established society. There must be inequality of ranks; and of course a diversity of outward appearance among men. But it is in the outward appearance that the diversity lies, far more than in what is intrinsic to happiness and well-being. — You *dwell among your own people*. In that rank where Providence had placed you, you are living among your friends and equals; and pursuing that train of life to which you have been bred. But you are eager and restless, till from this quiet obscurity you can rise to some higher elevation, to which you fancy yourself entitled. — Are you aware of the dangers and troubles that would await you there? Supposing you to be in some degree successful, yet, with your new rank of life, would not new burdens begin to oppress you, and new and unknown cares to vex you? How many rivals would you have to encounter? how many slanderers to decry you? how many enemies to combine in opposing you? What mortification would you endure on every disappointment you met with? and on every small step of advancement, what envy would still remain in looking up to those who continued above you? till at last, tired with the vexations of competition, you should be forced to regret the day when discontent drove you away from *dwelling among your own people*. — Awake then, in time, from the dreams of ambition and vanity. Instead of aspiring beyond your proper level, bring down your mind to your state; lest, by aiming too high, you spend your life in a train of fruitless pursuits,

and bring yourself at last to a state of entire insignificance and contempt.

Let it be farther considered, in order to show the folly of a discontented temper, that the more it is indulged, it disqualifies you the more from being free from the grounds of your discontent. First, you have reason to apprehend, that it will turn the displeasure of God against you, and make him your enemy. For, what have you to expect from that Providence towards which you are so sullen and unthankful; from that God, whose perfections you injure by your repining and accusing thoughts? How much is it in his power to render you ten times more unhappy than you are at present, by taking away those remaining comforts, which, by your contempt of them, you show yourself unworthy to enjoy? — Next, by your spleen and discontent, you are certain of bringing yourself into variance with the world as well as with God. Such a temper is likely to create enemies; it can procure you no friends. Proud, jealous, and dissatisfied with those around you, you will, in return, be avoided, disliked, and looked upon by them with an evil eye; the discouragements from the world, of which you complain, will daily increase; while the humble, the cheerful, and contented, will, on every occasion, get before you, and attract the good-will of all who can assist them.

SUCH being the mischiefs, such the guilt and the folly of indulging a discontented spirit, I shall now suggest some considerations which may assist us in checking it, and in reconciling our minds to the state in which it has pleased Providence to place us. Let us, for this purpose, attend to three great objects; to God, to ourselves, and to the world around us.

FIRST, Let us speak of God, of his perfections, and government of the world; from which, to every person of reflection who believes in God at all, there cannot but arise some cure to the discontents and griefs of the heart. For, had it been left to ourselves what to devise or wish, in order to secure peace to us in every state, what could we have invented so effectual as the assurance of being under the government of an Almighty Ruler, whose conduct to his creatures can have no other object but their good and welfare. — Above all, and independent of all, He can have no temptation to injustice or partiality. Neither jealousy nor envy can dwell with the Supreme Being. He is a rival to none, he is an enemy to none, except to such as, by rebellion against his laws, seek enmity with him. He is equally above envying the greatest, or despising the meanest of his subjects. — His dispensations, it is true, are often dark and unaccountable to us; but we know the reason of this to be, that we see only a part of them, and are not yet able to comprehend the whole. This we well know, that we ourselves are often the very worst judges of what is good or ill for us in this life. We grasp at the present, without due regard to consequences; and whether these consequences are to carry the advantages we had promised ourselves, or be pregnant with future evils, is what we cannot foresee. Experience has taught us a thousand times, that God judges better for us,

than we judge for ourselves. Often have we seen that what we considered at the time as sore disappointment, has proved in the issue to be a merciful providence; and that, if what we once eagerly wished for had been obtained, it would have been so far from making us happy, that it would have produced our ruin.—The reflection of Solomon, *Who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?** should often occur to every one who is given to discontent. Placed as we are, in the midst of so much ignorance with respect to the means of happiness, and at the same time under the government of a wise and gracious Being, who alone is able to effect our happiness, acquiescence in his disposal of our lot, is the only disposition that becomes us as rational creatures. To fret and repine at every disappointment of our wishes, is to discover the temper of froward children, not of men, far less of Christians. Christians, amidst all their grievances, have ever these promises to comfort them; that if they *cast their care upon God, he will care for them*; that out of evil, he bringeth forth good; nay, that at last *he shall make all things work together for good to them who love him*.

In the second place, In order to correct discontent, let us attend to ourselves and our own state. Let us consider two things there; how little we deserve, and how much we enjoy. As to deserving, in the sight of God, the great Disposer of our lot, we know that we have no claim. We are all sinners; who are so far from having a title to challenge favours as our due, that we must acknowledge it to be of God's mercies that we are not consumed. As to deserving from the world, we are apt indeed sometimes to make high and unreasonable pretensions; yet, surely, very conceited we must be, if we be not disposed to admit, that there are many of at least equal merit with us, whose condition in the world is no better, perhaps much worse than ours; who yet make no complaints, whose discontents are not heard. How much splendid genius is buried in forgotten neglect and obscurity? How much real worth and merit is driven forth to suffer all the hardships of a stormy life, while we *dwell among our own people*?—Look into your state, my brethren, and, before you give vent to peevishness, make a fair and just estimate of all the blessings you enjoy, in comparison with others. You would willingly, I know, exchange your condition, in part, with many. You would gladly have the wealth of this man; you would have the high reputation and honour of another; the health perhaps, and firm vigour of a third. But I ask, Who is there with whom you would wish to make a total exchange? to forego altogether your present self; and to be just what he is, in mind, and in body, as well as in outward estate? If this be an exchange, which few, I apprehend, are willing to make, does not this argue, that each man, on the whole, is sufficiently pleased with himself; that there are, in every situation, certain comforts, and certain grounds of self-complacency and satisfaction, which ought in reason to be employed as remedies against discontent?

In the last place, Consider the state of the world around you.—

You are not happy. You *dwell*, you admit, *among your own people*. But there, say you, "How many vexations do I occasionally experience? Sometimes distressed for want of health; sometimes disappointed in my plans, and straitened in my circumstances; at other times, afflicted with domestic troubles: so that I am far from being as I would wish to be."—Pray, my brother, who is there that lives in every respect just as he would wish to live? First, find out such a person; look through all conditions and ranks, and try if you can discover one who will tell you that he has no complaint or uneasiness whatever, before you allow yourself to repine at your present situation. Do you presume to indulge discontent, merely because you are included in the common lot; because you are not exempted from bearing your share of the common burden? What is human life to all, but a mixture of some scattered joys and pleasures, with various cares and troubles?

You have, perhaps, set your heart on some one thing, which, if you could attain it, you insist, would put an end to all your complaints, and give you full contentment. — Vain man! will no experience teach you wisdom? Have not you had the same opinion before this, of some other object of your desire; and did you not find that you was deceived in the enjoyment? Will you not then at last be persuaded that *all which cometh*, like all that is past, *is vanity*? — Vanity, believe it, is the indelible character imprinted on all human things. As far as happiness is to be found on earth, you must look for it, not in the world or the things of the world, but within yourselves, in your temper, and your heart. Let the world change into one form or another as it will, it will be a vain world to the end; and you, to the end, will be discontented. It cannot give you what you seek. • *The sea saith, It is not in me, and the earth saith, It is not in me. Silver and gold are to no purpose weighed for the price of it.* The decree of the Almighty hath past, and cannot be reversed, that man should find his true contentment, under every condition, only in a good conscience and a well-regulated mind, in a holy life, and the hope of Heaven. — You call yourself a Christian. Does not that name import that you consider yourself as a pilgrim and a passenger on earth; related in your expectations and hopes to a better world? Are you not ashamed to betray, by your discontent, a spirit so inconsistent with such hopes and expectations, and at the time when you profess to be looking towards the end of your journey, to show so much uneasiness about all the little circumstances of accommodation by the way? — Live by faith, my brethren, and you will live above this world and its discouragements. Dwell with God, and with things divine and immortal, and you shall dwell with true wisdom. You will find nothing so great in worldly events, as either to elate or deject you. Resting upon a principle superiour to the world, you will possess your spirits in peace, and will learn that great lesson of heavenly philosophy, *in whatever state you are, therewith to be content.*

SERMON LXXIX.

ON DRAWING NEAR TO GOD.

[Preached at the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

PSALM lxxiii. 28.

It is good for me to draw near to God. —

IN this psalm the pious author describes himself as suffering a great conflict within his mind. His observation of the course of Providence did not present to him such an order of things as was to have been expected from the justice and goodness of Heaven. The wicked appeared flourishing and triumphant, while the worthy were destitute and oppressed; and much disorder and darkness seemed to prevail in the course of human affairs. Hence his mind fluctuated for a while amidst doubts and fears. His trust in the divine administration was even so far shaken as to create a suspicion, that in *vain he had cleansed his heart, and washed his hands in innocency*: till at last he went into the sanctuary of God, and was there taught to view the state of human things in a juster and truer light. He then saw the vanity of that earthly prosperity which bad men appear to enjoy; and the happy issue of all things at the last to the pious and good. He saw the Divine presence ever surrounding them, and though with invisible guidance, yet with unerring hand, bringing them in the end to glory. His mind returned to tranquillity; and, struck with compunction for his past errors, he rose into those high and memorable expressions of devotion, which we find in the verses preceding the Text. *Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.* His fixed principle and resolution, upon the whole, he declares in the words of the Text, *It is good for me to draw near to God*; words which will immediately occur to you as particularly suited to the solemn service in which we are to be engaged this day. In discoursing from them, I shall endeavour to show what is implied in *drawing near to God*; and what reason we have, to agree with the Psalmist in judging this to be *good for us*.

To *draw near to God*, is an expression of awful and mysterious import; in explaining which, we have much reason to be sober and modest, and to guard with care against every enthusiastic excess; remembering always that, rise as high as we can, an immeasurable and infinite distance must ever remain between us and the Supreme Being. There are two senses in which we may be said to *draw near*, in such a degree as mortality admits, to God: either by the general course of a pious and virtuous life; or in solemn acts of immediate devotion.

I. By the practice of holiness and virtue throughout the general

tenour of life, we may be said to *draw near to God*; for it is such an approach as we can make to the resemblance of his moral perfections. After the image of God, man was created. That image was defaced by our sin and apostacy. By a return to God and our duty, that image, through the intervention of our Saviour, is renewed upon the soul; man is said to be regenerated or born again, and is in some degree restored to that connexion with God which blessed his primordial state. He who lives in the exercise of good affections, and in the regular discharge of the offices of virtue and piety, maintains, as far as his infirmity allows, conformity with the nature of that perfect Being, whose benevolence, whose purity and rectitude, are conspicuous, both in his works and his ways. — Wordly and corrupt men, on the contrary, estrange themselves from all that is divine. They degrade their nature by unworthy pursuits, and are perpetually sinking in the scale of being. By sensuality, they descend to the rank of the brute creation; by malignity, envy, and other bad passions, they connect themselves with devils and infernal spirits. Hence they are said in Scripture, to be *alienated from the life of God*; to be *without God in the world*. Though, in one sense, God is ever near them, as he surrounds and encompasses them on all hands; yet, in a spiritual sense, they are farther removed from him than any distance of place can separate bodies from one another. — Whereas a virtuous man, whose pleasure it is to do good, and his study to preserve himself upright and pure, is in the course of constant approach towards celestial nature. He is the lover of order, the follower of that righteousness of which God is the author and inspirer. He accords with the great laws of the universe, and seconds the designs of its Almighty Governour. He is, if we may so speak, in unison with God. Hence piety and virtue are described in Scripture as friendship with God, as introducing us into his family, and rendering us *members of his household*. Strong expressions are used on this subject by the sacred writers. A good man is said to *dwell in God, and God in him.** *If a man love me, says our Lord, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him; and we will come, and make our abode with him.*†

THESE high and magnificent views of religion, as an approach to God, may easily satisfy us how much it must be good for us to draw near to God, in this sense of the expression. It is visibly the honour and dignity of man to resemble his Creator; and surely his chief happiness will be ever found to lie, where his highest dignity and honour are found. *With God is the fountain of life.* With him reside complete beatitude and perfection; and from him are derived all the portions of happiness and comfort, which are any where to be found among the creatures he has made. In exact proportion, therefore, as they approach to, or deviate from him, must the happiness or misery of all rational creatures be. As light and heat flow from the sun as their centre, so bliss and joy flow from the Deity; and as with our distance from that glorious luminary, darkness and cold increase; so, according as by alienation of nature we are removed from God, ruin and misery advance in the same degree upon the soul.

* 1 John, iii. 24. — iv. 13.

† John, xiv. 23.

Now consider, my brethren, that there is one or other course which you must pursue. If it be not your study to *draw near to God* by a religious and virtuous life, be assured that you are departing from him; for there is no middle course between sin and righteousness; and let every thinking being seriously reflect what is included in this state of being far from God, and cut off from every kindly influence that descends from heaven. With shadows of pleasure, persons in this unhappy situation may be surrounded and amused; but shadows only, and not realities, they must be, as long as men have no connexion with Him who is the origin of all good. Can the stream continue to flow when it is cut off from the fountain? Can the branch flourish when torn away from the stock which gave it nourishment? No more can dependent spirits be happy, when parted from all union with the Father of Spirits and the Fountain of Happiness.

A good man, who is always endeavouring to draw near to God, lives under the smiles of the Almighty. He knows that he is under the protection of that God towards whom he aspires. He can look up to him with pleasing hope; and trust that he shall receive illumination and aid in his progress to perfection. His virtues may as yet be imperfect, and attended with many failings; but his approach towards God is begun. The steps by which he draws near to him may be slow; but that progress is commenced, which in a future state shall be more successfully carried on, and which shall continue to advance through all eternity. *They go on*, says the Psalmist, *from strength to strength; every one of them appeareth before God in Zion.** Hence, by a very beautiful and instructive metaphor, the *path of the just* is, described in Scripture to be *as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*† It is the dawn of a glorious morning, which increases by degrees to meridian splendour; and as the morning dawn, though dim and feeble, is nevertheless a ray of the same light which forms the brightness of noon-day, we are hereby taught to conceive, that the piety and virtue of good men now, is a degree of celestial nature already imparted to their souls, and differs from its perfection in a higher world, only as the twilight is inferior to noon. The path of the wicked man is directly the reverse of all this. Degraded by his vices, he is constantly declining more and more in a downward course. His path, instead of being as the shining light, is the dusk of evening begun: that darkness of the infernal regions to which his nature is tending increases upon him gradually, till the shadows of night close upon his head at last, with endless and impenetrable gloom. — Thus fully is verified what the Psalmist had asserted in the verse preceding the Text, *Lo! they that are far from thee shall perish*; while his own fixed sentiment he immediately declares, — *but it is good for me to draw near to God.* — I proceed,

II. To consider the other sense in which we may be said to draw near to God; that is, in acts of immediate devotion.

There are two ways by which these contribute to bring us near to God. The first is, by their strengthening in the soul that power of vital godliness and virtue, in which consists our chief resemblance to

* Psalm lxxiv. 7.

† Prov. iv. 18.

God: for it is never to be forgotten, that all our devotional exercises are subservient to this great end. Herein consists their whole virtue and efficacy, that they purify and improve the soul, raise it above low passions, and thereby promote the elevation of the human nature towards the divine. When they are considered merely as external services which we are obliged to perform, but to which we address ourselves with cold and backward hearts; or when the glow of affection which they excite is merely momentary and soon forgotten, they cannot be held to have any influence in bringing us near to God. It is only when they are the service of the heart, when they are the genuine voice of the soul to God, when they serve to kindle those sacred aspirations which continue to breathe throughout the rest of life, that they assist us in rising towards heaven, and alliance with God.

When our acts of devotion are of this nature, they form the other sense in which the words of the Text are to be understood. We therein *draw near to God*, as we enter into the most immediate intercourse with him, which the nature of our state admits. In one sense, we cannot be said to be nearer to God at any one time than another; as at all times his presence equally surrounds us; in the fields, as in the temple; in the midst of the world, as much as in the retirement of the closet. But when with serious and devout affections we address ourselves to God, in prayer, and praise, and solemn worship, we then bring home that Divine Presence to our feelings, and formally place ourselves in it. We may then be truly said to *draw near to God*; approaching to him through a great Mediator and Intercessor; sending up those prayers to which we are encouraged to believe that the Almighty is lending a gracious ear; resigning ourselves to his conduct, and offering up our souls to him; exercising, in short, all those acts of faith, love, and trust, which become dependent creatures towards their Sovereign and Father.

This intellectual correspondence of the heart with our Maker and Redeemer, is termed, in the language of divines, communion with God. And, if there be truth in religion at all; if a Supreme Being exist, who is in any degree accessible to his creatures, and who is gracious to the good, it must be admitted to have a foundation in reason and truth. There must be just ground to think, that the worship of pure and holy hearts is acceptable to him; and the Gospel gives us full reason to believe, that the energy of his spirit is concerned in stirring up within them the sentiments of devotion. •

At the same time it is incumbent on me to warn you, that the satisfaction which on such occasions we feel, must not be grounded merely on a belief which we allow ourselves to entertain, of some communication which we had received directly from God. In the warm and transporting moments of devotion, there is always a hazard of our mistaking the exalted efforts of our own imagination, for supernatural impressions from Heaven. It is much safer to judge of the acceptance of our services, by an inference which we can warrantably draw from the state of our hearts and life, compared to God's written word. *To the law and the testimony* we must always

have recourse in judging of our state; and then only the *testimony of God's spirit witnesseth with our spirits* that we are the 'children of God, when we can discern in ourselves those declared *fruits of the Spirit*, which are *love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance.**

Carrying along with us this caution, it will be found that, on many accounts, it will be *good for us to draw near to God* in exercises of solemn devotion.

First, It is evidently *good for us*, to discharge those duties of worship, and to give proof of those pious affections, which are unquestionably due from us to our Heavenly Father. If we be wanting in these, we are clearly deficient in one essential part of religion. Morality without piety, constitutes a very imperfect character. It is neither stable in its foundation, nor universal in its influence; and gives us no ground to look for the rewards of those, whose *prayers, together with their alms, come up in memorial before God.*

But, besides the obligations from duty which we are laid under to such religious exercises, it can clearly be shown, that they are in themselves good for us, on account of the improvement, the satisfaction, and comfort, they enable us to enjoy, in a devout elevation of the heart towards God and celestial objects.

When we reflect on the languor that attends the ordinary circulation of the little occupations of life; on the insipidity of many of its amusements; and the depression of spirits that follows after them; we cannot but be sensible that occasional intercourse with God and divine things, must furnish a comfortable relief to the mind. It is not, indeed, an intercourse for which we are at all times equal, but neither was the human mind formed to grovel at all times among low cares and objects. It has a demand for something higher and greater, than what the common round of the world affords. Hence the extravagant and eccentric pursuits into which we sometimes deviate. We attempt some higher bliss, than what we find here. But the attempt which is made by folly, can only be successfully executed by a wise and good man, in the elevation of his soul towards God. Some, indeed, are sunk so low in worldly gratifications, that nothing has any relish with them, but what either breathes the air of giddy dissipation, or tastes of the impure stream of sensual pleasure. But this vitiated taste, contracted by long corrupt habits, is unnatural in itself, and by proper discipline can be corrected and reformed. Let the mind be restored to its sound and natural state, and its relish for what is more great and noble will return.

Besides the imperfection and emptiness of the ordinary pleasures of the world, many pains and distresses are always mingled with them. No more effectual relief from them can be found, than that which may be enjoyed in drawing near to God. Passions corrode the mind. Cares and anxieties fester in it. We are fretted by the ingratitude of friends; soured by the calumnies of enemies; harassed with the competition of rivals. The very bustle and agitation of the world wear out and oppress the mind that longs for tranquillity.

In religious retirement, and in those exercises of devotion that bring us near to God, we attain a pleasing region of calm and repose. There, worldly passions are silent; worldly cares are hushed and forgotten. The mind retires as within itself; and remains alone with God. It is only as afar off that the noise and disturbance of the world is heard, like the sound of a distant tumult.

By the perplexity of our worldly concerns, we may have been involved in trouble. By the death of our dearest friends, we may have been overwhelmed with sorrow. By the situation of public affairs, we may be alarmed with dangers that threaten our country. In all such situations, is there any consolation equal to that which the devout man enjoys in drawing near to God? He looks up to a Father and a Friend, in whom he can place his trust in every time of need. He hears a voice issuing from the divine sanctuary, which says, *Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will deliver thee. Fear not, for I am with thee; be not dismayed, for I am thy God.* Comforted by such words, his mind regains tranquillity. Resting on the hope that the God whom he serves will never forsake him, he can dismiss from his thoughts the fears, the troubles, and wickedness of men, and compose his spirit to dwell among celestial things. Looking up to that blessed world where he expects to find his repose, he beholds no objects but what he can contemplate with delight, as great, peaceful, and serene. There, he beholds none of the agitations and turmoils of men; no tumults, nor factions, nor wars; no friends, who die and leave us; no ambitious men, who aspire to oppress; nor violent men, who attempt to destroy; nor fraudulent brethren, who, with a smiling countenance, cheat and deceive. In perfect contrast to the confusion of the earth, he beholds all things above, proceeding in the same perfect order with the heavenly bodies, which move in their orbs with smooth and steady course. He sees the river of life flowing continually from before the throne of God; and diffusing, among the blessed inhabitants, *fulness of joy, and pleasures for evermore.*

From such devout contemplations and hopes arose that great delight which holy men of ancient times describe themselves to have felt in drawing near to God, and which they have expressed in language so vivid and glowing. *Blessed; O Lord, is the man whom thou chooseth, and causeth to approach unto thee; that he may dwell in thy courts, and be satisfied with the goodness of thy house, and of thy holy place. — O God, thou art my God, early will I seek thee. Because thy loving kindness is better than life, my lips shall praise thee. I will lift up my hands in thy name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness; and my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips, when I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches. — Whom have I in heaven, but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire, besides thee.** When such language as this expresses the native sentiments of our hearts, we join ourselves in some measure to the angelical choir above, and anticipate the employments of the blessed.

* Psalm lxxv. 4. — lxiii. 1. 3—6. — lxxiii. 25.

SOME may perhaps imagine, that what has been said of the importance and the advantages of *drawing near to God*, approaches, in some degree, to mysticism and enthusiasm. I admit, that if religion were represented as consisting wholly of internal devout emotions, the representation of it would be imperfect and false. It is designed to be an active principle, regulating the conduct of life, and exerting itself in good works. But very ignorant he must be of human nature, who perceives not, that, in order to produce such effects, it is of high importance to engage the affections and the heart on the side of virtue. It is not by reasonings address'd solely to the understanding, that men's characters are formed, or their general conduct actuated. If you wish to work any considerable effect on their life, you must bring over the affections and inclinations to your side. You must not only show them what is right and true, but make them feel what is desirable and good. If you attempt to make religion so very calm and rational, as to exclude from it all warmth of sentiment, all affectionate and devotional feelings, you will leave it in possession of small influence on conduct. *My son, give me thy heart*, is the voice of God; and the voice of reason is, that, according as the heart is affected and disposed, such will be the general character and conduct.

THE application of the whole subject to the holy sacrament, which we are now to celebrate, is natural and obvious. No more solemn opportunity can be afforded us of drawing near to God, than what we there enjoy. All that is encouraging and comforting in Christian faith is set before us, in this most effectual proof of God's mercy to mankind, giving up his Son to the death as a sacrifice for our sins. In celebrating the memorial of this great event, we are placed as under the immediate brightness of heavenly light, and under the warmest ray of Divine love. If there be *any consolation in Christ, any fellowship of the Spirit*, any pleasing hope of eternal life and joy, it ought on such an occasion to be drawn forth, and deeply felt. Let us endeavour to kindle, at the altar of the Lord, that sacred fire, which shall continue to diffuse its vivifying influence over our hearts, when we go abroad into the world, and mingle again in the ordinary concerns of life. We are now to *draw near to God*. Let us draw near to him as our Father; but with that reverence and humility which becomes us on approaching to a Father *who is in Heaven*. Let us draw near through that great Mediator, by whose merits and intercession alone our services find acceptance at the Divine throne. *No man cometh unto the Father but through him; and none who cometh unto God by him, will be cast out.*

SERMON LXXX.

ON WISDOM IN RELIGIOUS CONDUCT.

PSALM ci. 2.

I will behave myself wisely in a perfect way.

WISDOM, says Solomon, *excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness.** In our present state, there is no situation in which we can, consistently with safety to ourselves, act thoughtlessly and at random. In whatever enterprise we engage, consideration and prudent thought are requisite to bring it to a good issue. On every occasion, there is a right and a wrong in conduct; there is one line of action which is likely to terminate according as we wish; and another which, for certain, will land us in disappointment. If, in the ordinary transactions of life, we cannot prosper without a due exercise of wisdom and prudence, a higher degree of it is certainly necessary in those momentous parts of conduct which regard our everlasting welfare.

It is indeed confessed, that in religious conduct the fundamental and most important article is sincerity of heart, and goodness of intention. At the same time, let the intentions be ever so pure and sincere, they will be in hazard of falling into some wrong direction, unless they be properly guided by wisdom. Too many instances have appeared, of persons, who, setting out in life with fair and virtuous purposes, have been so far bewildered by mistaken forms of goodness, as to be betrayed, first into errors, and then into vices and crimes. In order to act our parts with propriety and steadiness, there must be a due proportion of light in the understanding, as well as of warmth and goodness in the heart. The Psalmist was sensible of this when he declares in the Text his resolution, of not only *walking in a perfect*, or upright, *way*, but of *behaving himself wisely* in that perfect way. Of the wisdom or prudence which is necessary to guide and support virtue, I purpose to treat in this Discourse. I shall adventure, with great plainness and simplicity of language, to propose some practical rules and directions for that purpose; which may be of service to persons who, with good dispositions and intentions, are beginning the career of life; and which may, perhaps, deserve attention from persons in every period of age. — I begin by observing,

I. THAT it is most necessary to lay down principles on which we are to form our general conduct. If we set out without principles of any kind, there can be no regular plan of life, nor any firmness in conduct. No person can know where they are to find us; nor on what behaviour of ours they are to depend. If the principles which we pitch upon for determining our course be of a variable nature; such, for instance, as popular opinion, reputation, or worldly interest; as these are often shifting and changing, they can impart no steadiness or consistency to conduct. Other principles there are, which some affect to adopt, founded on a sense of honour, on the beauty and excellency

* Eccles. ii. 13.

of virtue, and the dignity of human nature. But, however fair these may be in appearance, they will be found ineffectual in many trying situations; unable to repress the violence of contending passions, or to support the heart under many discouragements and sorrows.

The only sure principles we can lay down for regulating our conduct, must be founded on the Christian religion, taken in its whole compass; not confined to the exercises of devotion, nor to the mere morality of social behaviour; but extending to the whole direction of our conduct towards God and towards man. The foundation is to be laid in faith in Christ as the Saviour of the world, through whose merits only we can look for final acceptance with God. We must evince the sincerity of our faith by good works; that is, by a faithful discharge of all the duties incumbent upon us in our several stations of life: continually looking up to Divine grace for assistance in the part assigned us to act; and trusting to that recompence of our present labours, which is promised to the virtuous in a future and better world.—Supposing, that, having laid the foundation in such principles, we set forth to act a worthy and virtuous part; resolved that, whatever may befall us, *till we die, we will not remove our integrity from us; that our hearts shall not reproach us so long as we live.** I proceed to advise,

II. THAT we begin with reforming whatever has been wrong in our former behaviour. This counsel is the more important, because too many, in their endeavours towards reformation, begin with attempting some of the highest virtues, or aspiring to the most sublime performances of devotion, while they suffer their former accustomed evil habits to remain just as they were. This, I apprehend, is beginning at the wrong end. We must first, as the Prophet has exhorted, *put away the evil of our doings from before God's eyes; we must cease to do evil, before we learn to do well.*† All attempts at reformation of manners are vain, where this is not studied. Let us remember, that as long as the weeds and tares are allowed to remain in the ground, the soil is vitiated by their roots spreading deep and wide; and no good grain will have room to spring up.—Every man who inspects his own character, may learn that there are certain failings, to which, from constitution, circumstances, or long habit, he is prone; termed in Scripture the *sins that most easily beset us*. To discover these, must be his first care; and his first purpose, if he in truth wishes to become a good man, must be gradually to check, and finally to extirpate them, of whatever nature they are; whether, perhaps, habits of intemperance, unlawful indulgences of pleasure, indirect methods of acquiring gain, or propensions to malice, resentment, or envy. To overcome those evils when they have become inveterate, to pluck up those thorns by the roots, is perhaps the most difficult part of reformation; and therefore what we are generally the most backward to undertake. At the same time it is certain, that as long as, by this tender indulgence to favourite vices, men remain in a divided state between good resolutions and evil habits, they are so far from behaving *wisely in a perfect way*, that they can scarcely be accounted to

* Job, xxvii. 5, 6.

† Isaiah, i. 16, 17.

have entered on that *perfect way*; irresolution will be spread over their conduct, and incoherence will mark their character.—In order to facilitate so necessary a step in the progress towards virtue, let me advise you,

III. To shut up, as much as possible, the avenues which lead to the return of former evil habits. Here is required that exercise of vigilance, self-distrust, and self-denial, which is so often recommended to us in Scripture. There is always some one side on which each of us is more vulnerable than on another. There are places, there are times, there are circumstances, which every man who knows any thing of himself at all, must know will prove the occasions of calling forth his latent frailties, and bringing him into some fatal snare. Then ought that caution of the Apostle to sound in his ears; *Let him that thinketh he standeth, take heed lest he fall.** Let him not only *walk circumspectly*, but rather altogether fly the dangerous ground; aware of the viper which lurks under the grass, ready to sting. But presumption to flatter ourselves, and to think that we are able to withstand every danger, is a weakness inherent in man. It is on a moderate and humble estimation of our abilities, that wisdom directs us to form our conduct. As in civil and political life, he who believes himself equal to every task, and on all occasions comes forward with rash audacity, is likely to meet with many a humiliation and repulse; so, in moral behaviour, he who, trusting to the strength of his virtuous resolutions, exposes himself inconsiderately to every occasion of temptation, is sure of being often betrayed into evil.

All the various and dangerous avenues to vice, with which, in great cities especially, modern life abounds, it cannot be expected that I am here to point out. Wealth, luxury, and idleness, are the great nourishers of every frailty; the great fomenters of every bad inclination and passion. To the children of Idleness, the haunts of Dissipation open many a wide and inviting gate by night and by day. When within those gates they carelessly enter, surrounded with loose companions, how often does it happen, that from the halls of pleasure and houses of gaming, they come forth, as from caverns of destruction, overwhelmed with losses and miseries, and pining with bitter remorse?—Much does it concern every one who seeks to *walk wisely in a perfect way*, to be particularly guarded in the choice of his associates and companions. How often among the gay and the giddy will he meet with those who smile and betray! *He only who walketh with wise men shall be wise; while the companion of fools shall be destroyed.†* Observe the attention which, in the verses immediately following the Text, King David declares himself to have given to this rule of conduct; *I will set no wicked thing before mine eyes; I will not know a wicked person. Mine eyes shall be on the faithful of the land. He that worketh deceit shall not dwell within my house. He that telleth lies, shall not tarry in my presence.* Such was the wisdom that assisted him to continue in a perfect way.—This wisdom requires farther,

IV. THAT consistency and uniformity be preserved in character; that not by pieces and corners only we study goodness, but that we

* 1 Cor. x. 12.

† Prov. xiii. 20.

carry one line of regular virtue through our whole conduct. Without this extensive regulation of behaviour, we can never hold on successfully in a perfect way. Almost all men, even the loose and profligate, lay claim to some one virtue or other, and value themselves on some good moral disposition, which they boast of possessing. It is in vain, therefore, that we rest our character on one or a few estimable qualities, which we imagine ourselves to possess in a high degree, while in other points of virtue we are relaxed and deficient. True virtue must form one complete and entire system. All its parts are connected; piety with morality, charity with justice, benevolence with temperance and fortitude. If any of these parts be wanting, the fabric becomes disjointed; the adverse parts of character correspond not to each other, nor form into one whole. It is only when we *have respect unto all God's commandments*, as the Psalmist speaks, that we have reason *not to be ashamed*.

The apology for many of those breaches of consistency is always at hand, that the transgression is small, and can easily be repaired on a future occasion; and small sins, we imagine, may be compensated by great and distinguished virtues. But no seduction is more dangerous, than this distinction which men are so ready to make between great and small sins. Nothing is more difficult, than to draw the line of this distinction with any warrantable precision. Wherever inclination gives a strong bias to any indulgence, we may be assured that we shall be always misled in measuring the quantity of guilt. No sin is to be accounted small, by which the dictate of conscience is counteracted, and its authority is weakened and impaired. It may soon draw consequences after it, which will affect our whole conduct. Supposing the matter of these transgressions to be ever so small in its own nature, yet the moral characters of men become stained and bloated by their frequent accumulations; just as many small ulcers, when allowed to form and spread, will grow by degrees into a great disease. — At the same time, when I thus advise you to study entire and consistent virtue, and to guard strictly against small transgressions, let me warn you,

V. AGAINST unnecessary austerity, as forming any part of religious wisdom. This is the meaning of the precept of Solomon, *Be not righteous overmuch; neither make thyself over-wise; why shouldest thou destroy thyself?** Too strict and scrupulous, indeed, we cannot be in our adherence to what is matter of clear duty. Every dictate of conscience is to be held sacred, and to be obeyed without reserve. But wisdom requires that we study to have conscience properly enlightened with respect to what really belongs to duty, or infers sin. We must distinguish with care the everlasting commandments of God, from the superstitious fancies and dictates of men. We must never overload conscience with what is frivolous and unnecessary, nor exhaust on trifles, that zeal which ought to be reserved for the weightier matters of the law. In all ages, it has been the great characteristic of false pretenders to piety and religion, to arrogate to themselves uncommon sanctity, by affected strictness and severity of

* Eccles. vii. 16.

manners; paying tithes, like the Pharisees of old, of mint, anise, and cummin, while they overlook righteousness, judgment, and mercy. That religion which is connected with true wisdom leads to a very different spirit. It will teach us to be neither rigid in trifles, nor relaxed in essentials; not to aim at impracticable heights, nor to fall below the standard of attainable duty; never to make ostentation of our righteousness, nor to set ourselves up as patterns and standards to others, but to be gentle and unassuming; without harshness in our manners, or severity in our censures, when others depart in some particulars from our mode of thinking on religious subjects.

At the same time, we are to remember that, in order to avoid austerity, it by no means follows that we should run into an unlimited compliance with the manners of others around us. This is a danger to which they are often exposed, whose tempers are mild, and whose manners are condescending. In that mixed and various intercourse, which the present state of society forces upon us, few things, indeed, are more difficult, than to ascertain the precise degree of compliance with the world which virtue allows. To preserve a just medium between a formal austerity on the one hand, and that weak and tame facility on the other, which betrays men into many vices, is one of the most important and arduous exercises of religious wisdom. A manly steadiness of conduct is the object which we are always to keep in view; studying to unite gentleness of manners with firmness of principle, affable behaviour with untainted integrity.

VI. In order to walk wisely in a perfect way, it is of importance that we study propriety in our actions and general behaviour. There are few precise rules of conduct that can be applied alike to all men. In some of the fundamental virtues, indeed, no circumstances can admit the least variation. There are no situations, for instance, in which truth, justice, and humanity, are not required equally from all. But, in a great number of the duties of life, the manner of discharging them must vary, according to the different ages, characters, and fortunes of men. To suit our behaviour to each of these; to judge of the conduct which is most decent and becoming in our situation, is a material part of wisdom. Without this attention to propriety, virtue will lose much of its grace and efficacy; nay, good dispositions may degenerate into mere weaknesses and follies. The behaviour, for instance, which would be engaging in youth, is unsuitable to advanced years. What is innocent gaiety in the one, becomes culpable levity in the other; and to assume in youth that authority and dignity to which years only give any title, is impertinent affectation. In like manner, to the different ranks of men in society, there belongs a different strain of manners. Whatever is either above or below that line of life in which Providence has placed us, hurts every impartial observer, and suits not the propriety of virtue. What is proper dignity in one station, may, in another, be presumptuous arrogance; and while suitable dependence belongs to those of inferior rank, it ought not to sink into a degrading servility. With a change in the situation of our fortunes, our duties obviously change. What was commendable frugality in one condition, may become sordid parsimony

as our estate rises; and the generosity required of the affluent, turns into extravagance and injustice when our circumstances are impaired. — In all those attentions to propriety, some regard will, of course, be had to the opinions which the world forms of us. No man has a title to despise altogether what the world thinks, and what it expects from him. But this regard to the sentiments of others, must never go so far as to encroach on what a man's own conscience tells him, it is his duty either to do, or to forbear doing. In the scale by which we measure the propriety of our conduct, the opinion of the world must never be the preponderating weight. — Let me recommend,

VII. THE observance of order and regularity in the whole of conduct.* This may, at first appearance, seem an article of inferior importance, and hardly deserving to be ranked among moral duties. But I am persuaded that it is more nearly connected with virtue, than many persons imagine; and that it maintains an important place in that wisdom which directs a perfect way. If ever you mean to carry a consistent line of virtue throughout your conduct, you must allot to every transaction its place and its season. Hurry and tumult, disorder and confusion, are both the characteristics of vice and the parents of it. Let your time be regularly distributed, and all your affairs be arranged with propriety, in method and train. Thus, and thus only, can you be masters of yourselves; your time and your life will be your own; and what is serious and important, will not be justled out of its place, by that crowd of inferior cares, which are for ever pressing on the disorderly, and frustrating the plans which they had formed for the wise and proper regulation of life. — Consider too, that, if order be not studied, there can be no prudent economy in the management of your fortune and worldly affairs; and economy, be assured, is a great guardian of all the private and domestic virtues. When order and economy are neglected, you are in hazard of being first involved in distresses, and then inveigled into crimes; whereas, under the direction of regular conduct, both your worldly and your religious concerns will be more in the course of prospering. — I have now only to add,

VIII. THAT we should give attention to all the auxiliary means which religion offers for assisting and guiding us to walk wisely in a perfect way. These open a large field to the care of every good man. We must always remember, that virtue is not a plant which will spontaneously grow up and flourish in the human heart. The soil is far from being so favourable to it; many shoots of an adverse nature are ever springing up, and much preparation and culture are required for cherishing the good seed, and raising it to full maturity. — Among the means for this purpose, let me first mention the serious reading of the Holy Scripture. That sacred book, as the standard of our belief and practice, claims, on every account, our frequent perusal. In the New Testament, the brightest display of our Lord's energetic example, joined with his simple, affecting, and instructive discourses, illustrated by the writings of his inspired followers; in the Old Testament, the variety of matter, the ardent glow of devotion

* Vide on this subject Serm. XVI.

in some parts, and the mysterious sublimity of others; all conspire to affect the mind with serious and solemn emotions. Passages impressed on the memory from those sacred volumes, have often, from their recurrence, had a happy effect. In our early years, most of us were accustomed to look with respect upon those venerable records; and woe be to them, who, looking back upon the days of their father's house, can trample with scorn on the memory of those, whose pious cares were employed in forming them to good principles, and teaching them to reverence the word of God!—Let me next recommend a serious regard to all the established means of religious instruction; such as, attending regularly the preaching of the word, partaking frequently of the holy sacrament, and preserving a sacred reverence for the Lord's day. Whenever all regard to the Lord's day becomes abolished; when on it we are allowed to mingle without any distinction in our common affairs, and even in our ordinary diversions and amusements, we may account this a certain symptom of declining virtue, and of approaching general immorality. We have beheld in a neighbouring kingdom, how fatally it proved the forerunner of an entire dissolution both of moral and civil order in society. Whatever disregard certain modern refiners of morality may attempt to throw on all the instituted means of public religion, assuredly they must, in their lowest view, be considered as the outguards and fences of virtuous conduct; and, even in this view, must deserve the esteem and respect of all good men. We know, and are often enough told, that the *form of godliness* may subsist without the *power* of it. But depend upon it, wherever the *form of godliness* is entirely gone, the ruin of its *power* is not far off. Whoever has studied the human mind, may soon be satisfied of this truth.

Besides attention to the public means of religious improvement, much will depend on our own private exercises of devotion and serious thought. Prayer, in particular, operates to our high advantage, both by the immediate assistance which we may hope it will procure from Him who is the author and inspirer of virtue, and by its native influence in softening, purifying, and exalting the heart. In vain would he attempt to behave himself wisely in a perfect way, who looks not frequently up to God for grace and aid; and who would presumptuously attempt to separate moral virtue from devotion, its natural and original ally. Besides the exercises of religious worship, both public and private, seasonable returns of retirement from the world, of calm recollection and serious thought, are most important auxiliaries to virtue. He who is without intermission engaged in the bustle of society and worldly occupation, becomes incapable of exercising that discipline over himself, and giving that attention to his temper and character, which virtue requires. *Commune with your own hearts on your bed, and be still. Offer the sacrifices of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord.**

By the observance of such rules and maxims as have been now pointed out, it may be hoped that, through divine grace, we may be enabled to *behave ourselves wisely in a perfect way*, until, in the end, we receive

* Psalm iv. 4, 5.

the reward of such behaviour. The wisdom here spoken of, as conjoined with virtue, is that *wisdom from above*, which is appointed by God to enlighten and guide the course of integrity. It opens to us that *path of the just*, which is now as *the shining light*, and which will *shine more and more until the perfect day*.

SERMON LXXXI.

ON THE IMMORTALITY OF THE SOUL, AND A FUTURE STATE.

2 COR. v. 1.

For we know, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

THIS passage presents to us in one view the nature of our present earthly state, and the future object of the Christian's hope. The style is figurative; but the figures employed are both obvious and expressive. The body is represented as a house inhabited by the soul, or the thinking part of man. But it is an *earthly house*, a *tabernacle* erected only for passing accommodation, and *to be dissolved*; to which is to succeed the future dwelling of the just in a *building of God*, an *house not made with hands*, *eternal in the heavens*. Here then are three great objects presented to our consideration. First, the nature of our present condition. Secondly, that succeeding state which is the object of good men's hope. Thirdly, the certain foundation of their hope; *we know*, that if our *earthly house be dissolved*, we have a *building of God*.

I. THE Text gives a full description of our present embodied state; as an *earthly house*, an *earthly house of this tabernacle*, and a *tabernacle* which is *to be dissolved*.

We dwell in an *earthly house*. Within this cottage of earth is lodged that spiritual, immortal substance, into which God breathed the breath of life. So we are elsewhere said in Scripture, to have *our foundation in the dust*, and to *dwell in houses of clay*. During its continuance in this humble abode, the soul may be justly considered as confined and imprisoned. It is restrained from the full exertion of its powers by many obstructions. It can perceive and act only by very imperfect organs. It looks abroad as through the windows of the senses; and beholds truth as *through a glass darkly*. It is beset with a numerous train of temptations to evil, which arise from bodily appetites. It is obliged to sympathize with the body in its wants; and is depressed with infirmities not its own. For it suffers from the frailty of those materials of which its earthly house is compacted. It languishes and droops, along with the body; is wounded by its pains; and the slightest discomposure of bodily organs is sufficient to derange some of the highest operations of the soul.

All these circumstances bear the marks of a fallen and degraded

state of human nature. The mansion in which the soul is lodged corresponds so little with the powers and capacities of a rational immortal spirit, as gives us reason to think that the souls of good men were not designed to remain always thus confined. Such a state was calculated for answering the ends proposed by our condition of trial and probation in this life; but was not intended to be lasting and final. Accordingly the Apostle, in his description, calls it the earthly house of *this tabernacle*; alluding to a wayfaring or sojourning state, where tabernacles or tents are occasionally erected for the accommodation of passengers. The same metaphor is here made use of, which is employed in several other passages of Scripture, where we are said to be *strangers and sojourners on earth before God, as were all our fathers*. This earth may be compared to a wide field spread with tents, where troops of pilgrims appear in succession and pass away. They enter for a little into the tents prepared for them; and remain there to undergo their appointed probation. When that is finished, their tents are taken down, and they retire, to make way for others, who come forward in their allotted order. Thus *one generation passeth away, and another generation cometh*; and the *earthly house* is to all no other than the *house of their pilgrimage*.*

The *earthly house of this tabernacle*, the Apostle, proceeding in his description, tells us, *is to be dissolved*. Close as the union between the soul and body now appears to be, it is no more than a temporary union. It subsists only during the continuance of a tabernacle of dust, which, by its nature, is tending towards ruin. *The dust must soon return to the dust, and the spirit to God who gave it*. — The dissolution of the *earthly house of this tabernacle* is an event full of dismay to wicked men. Beyond that period they see nothing but a dark unknown, which, as far as they can discern, is peopled with objects full of terror; even to the just, this dissolution is a serious and awful event. Providence has wisely appointed that, burdened as our present state is with various ills and frailties, we should, however, be naturally attached to it. Its final close is always attended with several melancholy ideas. — Thou who now flourishest most in health and strength, must then have thy head laid low. From thy closing eyes the light of the sun shall disappear for ever. That light shall continue to shine, the seasons to return, and the earth to flourish; but to thee no more, separated from the dwellings of men, and cut off from all thou wert accustomed to love, as though thou hadst never been. — Such is the fate of man considered merely as mortal; as dwelling in an earthly house which is about to be dissolved. The consolatory corrective of those humbling ideas, the ray that is to dissipate this gloom, we behold in the subsequent part of the Text; that when this earthly house is dissolved, there is prepared for the righteous *a building of God, an house not made with hands*. But, before proceeding to this part of the subject, let us pause for a little, and make some reflections on what has been already said.

LET the distinction between the soul and the body, which is so clearly marked in the Text, be deeply imprinted on our minds. Few

* Psalm cxix. 54.

things in religion or morals are entitled to make a stronger impression than this distinction; and yet, with the bulk of men, the impression it makes appears to be slight. They seem to think and act as if they consisted of no more than mere flesh and blood, and had no other concerns than what respect their embodied state. If their health be firm, if their senses be gratified, and their appetites indulged, all is well with them. Is not this to forget that the body is no more than an *earthly house*, or *tabernacle* of the soul? The soul, that thinking part which they feel within them, and which it is impossible for them to confound with their flesh or their bones, is certainly far nobler than the tenement of clay which it inhabits. The soul is the principle of all life, and knowledge, and action. The body is no more than its instrument, or organ; and as much nobler as is the part which belongs to him who employs an instrument, than to the instrument which is employed, so much is the soul of greater dignity than the body. The one is only a frail and perishable machine; the other survives its ruin, and lives for ever. — During the time that the union continues between those two very different parts of our frame, I by no means say, that it is incumbent upon us to disregard all that relates to the body. It is not possible, nor, though it were possible, would it be requisite or fit, for man to act as if he were pure immaterial spirit. This is what the condition and laws of our nature permit not. — But must not the greatest sensualist admit, that if the soul be the chief part of man, it must have interests of its own, which require to be carefully attended to? Can he imagine that he truly consults either his interest or his pleasure, if he employs the thinking part of his nature only to serve, and to minister to the bodily part? Must not this infer, not merely a degradation of the superior part, but an entire perversion of that whole constitution of nature which our Maker hath given us? Be assured, my brethren, that the soul hath a health and a sickness, hath pleasures and pains of its own, quite distinct from those of the body, and which have a powerful influence on the happiness or misery of man. He who pays no attention to these, and neglects all care of preserving the health and soundness of his soul, is not only preparing final misery for himself when he shall enter into a disembodied estate, but is laying, even for his present state, the foundation of many a bitter distress. By folly and guilt he is *wounding his spirit*. Its wounds will often bleed when his body appears sound, and will give rise to inward pangs which no animal comforts shall be able to assuage or heal.

When we impress our minds with a sense of this important distinction between the body and the soul, let us not forget, that closely united as they now are in our frame, their union is soon to terminate. *The earthly house of this tabernacle is to be dissolved*; but the soul which inhabits it remains. Let us therefore dwell in our earthly house with the sentiments of those who know they are about to dislodge. The endowments and improvements of the soul are the only possessions, on which we can reckon as continuing to be our own. On every possession which belongs to our bodily estate, we ought to view this inscription as written by God; “This is an earthly house

“which is tottering to its fall: This is a tabernacle which is about to be taken down.”—Let us with pleasure turn our thoughts towards those higher prospects that are set before us, when this change shall have taken place in the human condition; which naturally brings us to the

IId Head of Discourse,—The great object of the hope of good men in a succeeding state. *The earthly house* is contrasted by the Apostle with a *building of God; an house not made with hands; and the tabernacle which is to be dissolved, with a house eternal in the heavens.*

The expressions here employed to signify what is promised to the righteous, *a building of God, an house not made with hands*, are expressions of a mysterious import. They suggest to us things which we cannot now conceive, far less describe. Into that house which is above, those habitations of eternity, no living man has entered, to explore them, and to report to us tidings of what he there beheld. A sacred veil conceals the mansions of glory. But, in general, these expressions of the Text plainly import, that the spirits of good men shall, upon death, be translated from an imperfect to a glorious state. Whether we explain *the building of God, the house not made with hands*, to signify the incorruptible bodies which the just shall animate at the resurrection, or the habitations of celestial glory into which they enter, they are terms which convey ideas of high magnificence and felicity. This earth on which we dwell, is no more than an exterior region of the great kingdom of God. It is but an entrance, through which, after suitable preparation, we pass into the palace of an Almighty Sovereign. Admitted there, we may hope to behold far greater objects than we now can behold; and to enjoy in perfection those pleasures which we here view from afar, and pursue in vain. Such degrees of pleasure are allowed us at present as our state admits. But a state of trial required that pains should be intermixed with our pleasures, and that infirmity and distress should often be felt. The remains of our fall appear every-where in our condition. The ruins of human nature present themselves on all hands. But *when that which is perfect is come, that which is in part shall be done away.* With the fall of the earthly house, all its rotten and corruptible materials shall disappear. *It is sown in corruption,* says the Apostle, speaking of the happy change made upon good men at the resurrection, *it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural, it is raised a spiritual body:—for this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality.**—Into that *house not made with hands, that building of God*, we have every reason to believe that there will be no room for such guests to intrude as care or sorrow. Nothing can be admitted to enter there, but what contributes to the felicity of those whom the Almighty hath allowed to dwell in his presence, and to *behold his face in righteousness.*

Besides the glory and perfection of this future state, the Text suggests its permanency. This *house not made with hands, is a house*

* 1 Cor. xv. 42—53.

eternal in the heavens. The tabernacle which we now inhabit is every moment liable to fall: above, is the fixed mansion, the seat of perpetual rest. Beyond doubt, the certain prospect of death renders every thing inconsiderable which we here possess. Every enjoyment is saddened, when we think of its end approaching. We become sensible that we are always building on sand, never on a rock. Fluctuation and change characterise all that is around us; and at the moment when our attachment to any persons or objects is become the strongest, they are beginning to slide away from our hold. But in the mansions above, alteration and decay are unknown. Every thing there continues in a steady course. No schemes are there begun, and left unfinished; no pleasing connexions just formed, and then broken off. The treasures possessed there shall never be diminished; the friends we enjoy there shall never die; and leave us to mourn. In those celestial regions, shines the sun that never sets; the calm reigns, which is never disturbed; the river of life flows with a stream, which is always unruffled in its course.

Such are the prospects, imperfectly as we can now conceive them, which are set forth to good men in a future world. But how, it may be asked, shall we be satisfied that such prospects are not mere illusions with which our fancy flatters us. Upon what foundations rests this mighty edifice of hope, which the Apostle here rears up for the consolation of Christians, and of which he speaks so confidently as to say, *We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God?* — To inquire into this was the

III^d proposed Head of Discourse, to which we now proceed. And as the subject is in itself so important, and so pleasing to all good men, I shall take a view of the different kinds of evidence, upon which our faith of a happy immortality is grounded.

We must observe, in the first place, that the dissolution of the earthly tabernacle at death affords no ground for thinking that the soul at the same time perishes, or is extinguished. I begin with this observation, because the strongest prejudices against the soul's immortality arise from what is sometimes found to happen at that period. The soul and the body are at present united by the closest sympathy. When one suffers, the other is affected. Both seem to grow up together to the maturity of their powers; and together both seem often to decay. Such a shock is apparently suffered by the soul at death, as at first view might lead us to suspect that it was sharing the same fate with the body. Notwithstanding this, there are clear proofs that the body and the soul, though at present closely connected by divine appointment with one another, are, however, substances of different and dissimilar natures. Matter, of which the body is composed, is a substance altogether dead and passive, and cannot be put in motion without some external impulse. Whereas the soul hath within itself a principle of motion, activity, and life. Between the laws of matter, and the action of thought, there is so little resemblance, or rather so much opposition, that mankind in general have agreed in holding the soul to be an immaterial substance; that is, a substance the nature of which we cannot explain or

define farther than that it is a substance quite distinct from matter. This being once admitted, it clearly follows, that since thought depends not on matter, from the dissolution of the material part we have no ground to infer the destruction of the thinking part of man. As long as by the ordination of the Creator these different substances remain united, there is no wonder that the one should suffer from the disorder or indisposition of the other.

It is so far from following that the soul must cease to act on the dissolution of the body, that it seems rather to follow, that it will then act in a more perfect manner. In its present habitation, it is plainly limited and confined in its operations. When it is let loose from that earthly house, it is brought forth into greater liberty. To illustrate this by an instance which may be conceived as analogous; let us suppose a person shut up in an apartment, where he saw light only through some small windows. If these windows were foul or dimmed, he would see less; if they were altogether darkened, he could see none at all. But were he let out from this confinement into the open air, he would be so far from being deprived of sight, that though at first overpowered by a sudden glare, he would soon see around him much more completely than before. The senses are as so many windows or apertures, through which the soul at present exercises its powers of perception. If the senses are disordered, the powers of the soul will be obstructed. But once separated from its earthly tenement, the soul will then exercise its powers without obstruction; will act with greater liberty, and in a wider sphere. — I admit this argument only goes as far as to show, that although the body perish, there remains with the soul a capacity for separate existence. Whether that existence shall be actually continued to it after death, must depend on the will of Him who gave it life, and who certainly at his pleasure can take that life away. It is necessary, therefore, to inquire into what, we have any reason to believe, may be the intention of our Creator concerning a future life.

I ARGUE then, in the next place, that if the soul were to perish when the body dies, the state of man would be altogether unsuitable to the wisdom and perfection of the Author of his being. Man would be the only creature that would seem to have been made in vain. All the other works of God are contrived to answer exactly the purposes for which they were made. They are either incapable of knowledge at all; or, they know nothing higher than the state in which they are placed. Their powers are perfectly suited and adjusted to their condition. But it is not so with man. He has every appearance of being framed for something higher and greater than what he here attains. He sees the narrow bounds within which he is here confined; knows and laments all the imperfections of his present state. His thirst for knowledge, his desires of happiness, all stretch beyond his earthly station. He searches in vain for adequate objects to gratify him. His nature is perpetually tending and aspiring towards the enjoyment of some more complete felicity than this world can afford. In the midst of all his searches and aspirations, he is suddenly cut off. He is but of yesterday, and to-morrow is gone.

Often in the entrance, often in the bloom of life, when he had just begun to act his part, and to expand his powers, darkness is made to cover him. — Can we believe, that when this [darkness] is come, all is finally over with the best and the worthiest of [men]? Endowed with so noble an apparatus of rational powers, [to form high] views and enlarged desires, were they brought [for no other] purpose, than to breathe this gross and impure air, and then to be cut off from all existence? All his other works, God hath made in *weight, number, and measure*; the hand of the Almighty artificer every-where appears. But on man, his chief work here below, he would, upon this supposition, appear to have bestowed no attention; and after having erected a stately palace, in the universe, framed with so much magnificence, and decorated with so much beauty, to have introduced man, in the guise of a neglected wanderer, to become its inhabitant.

Let us farther consider the confused and promiscuous distribution of good and evil in this life. The enjoyments of the world, such as they are, are far from being always bestowed on the virtuous and the worthy. On the contrary, the bitterest portion is often their lot. In the midst of infirmities, diseases, and sorrows, they are left to drag their life, while ease and affluence are allowed to the ungodly. — I must ask, if such an arrangement of things, owing to the ordination, or, at least, to the permission of Providence, be consistent to any ideas we can form of the wisdom and goodness of a Supreme Ruler, on the supposition of there being no future state? — But as soon as the immortality of the soul, and a state of future retribution are established, all difficulties vanish; the mystery is unravelled; supreme wisdom, justice, and goodness, are discovered to be only concealed for a little while behind the curtain. If that curtain were never to be withdrawn, and immortality never to appear, the ways of God would be utterly inexplicable to man. We would be obliged to conclude, that either a God did not exist; or, though he existed, that he was not possessed of such perfections as we now ascribe to him, if, when a worthy and pious man had spent his whole life in virtuous deeds, and perhaps had died a martyr to the cause of religion and truth, he should, after long and severe sufferings, perish finally, unrewarded and forgotten; no attention shown to him by the Almighty; no building of God erected for him; no house eternal prepared in the Heavens!

THESE reasonings are much strengthened by the belief that has ever prevailed among all mankind, of the soul's immortality. It is not an opinion that took its rise from the thin-spun speculations of some abstract philosophers. Never has any nation been discovered on the face of the earth so rude and barbarous, that, in midst of their wildest superstitions, there was not cherished among them some expectation of a state after death, in which the virtuous were to enjoy happiness. So universal a consent in this belief, affords just ground to ascribe it to some innate principle implanted by God in the human breast. Had it no foundation in truth, we must suppose that the Creator found it necessary, for the purposes of his govern-

ment, to carry on a principle of universal deception among his rational subjects. Many of the strongest passions of our nature are made to have a clear reference to the future existence of the soul. The love of fame, the widest concern which so often prevails about futurity, all allude to a state that in which men suppose themselves to be personally concerned after death. The consciences, both of the good and the bad, bear witness to a world that is to come. Seldom do men leave this world without some fears or hopes respecting it; some secret anticipations and presages of what is hereafter to befall them.

But though the reasonings which have been adduced to prove the immortality of the soul and a future state, are certainly of great weight, yet reasonings still they are, and no more; and in every human reasoning, suspicions may arise of some fallacy or error. In a point so momentous to us, as our existence after death, we never could, with absolute certainty and full satisfaction, have rested on any evidence except what was confirmed by the declaration of God himself. For many and high blessings we are indebted to the Christian revelation; for none more than for its having brought life and immortality to light. The revelations made by God to the world in early ages, gave the first openings to this great article of faith and hope. In future periods, the light dawned more and more; but it was not until the sun of righteousness arose by the appearance of Christ on earth, that the great discovery was completed. Then, indeed, were made known the city of the living God, the new Jerusalem above, the mansions prepared for the spirits of just men made perfect. Nor was a state of future felicity only proclaimed by Christ and his Apostles to good men, but was represented as purchased for them by the death of their Redeemer. *I give*, he was authorised to say, *unto my sheep eternal life. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you.** Accordingly, he lay down in the grave; rose as the first-fruits of them that slept; and ascending into Heaven, entered there within the veil, as the forerunner of his followers, to assure them of all being friendly and well-disposed towards them in those upper regions. All therefore who live and die in the faith and obedience of Jesus, are entitled to say with the Apostle, *We know*, not only we hope and we reason, but *we know*, that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens.

THE first and most natural improvement of all that has been said, is to produce in our hearts the most lasting gratitude, love, and reverence, towards that great Benefactor of mankind, who not only hath made known and published the blessings of a future state to the righteous, but by his great undertaking for their redemption hath erected in their behalf the house eternal in the Heavens.—The next improvement we should make, is to conduct our own life and behaviour as becomes those who have an interest in this happiness and this hope. From such persons assuredly is to be expected a

* John, x. 28. — xiv. 2.

pure, correct, and dignified behaviour in every situation; not a contempt of the employments, nor a renunciation of all the comforts of their present life. Opinions that produce such effects are connected only with the spirit of superstition and false religion. But to them it belongs, in the midst of the affairs, enticements, and temptations of the world, to regulate their conduct as becomes the heirs of a divine inheritance; never debasing themselves among what is mean, nor defiling themselves with what is corrupt in the present state; but serving God with that fidelity, and behaving to men with that steady magnanimity of virtue, that generous beneficence and humanity, which suits immortal beings, who are aspiring to rise in a future state to the perfection of their nature, in the presence of God.

SERMON LXXXII.

ON OVERCOMING EVIL WITH GOOD.

ROM. xii. 21.

Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.

IN this world we all know that we must reckon upon a mixture of goods and evils. Some of the evils are owing to the appointment of Providence in this state of trial; many of them are the fruits of our own guilt and misconduct. The goods and the evils of our state are so blended, as often to render the whole of human life a struggle between them. We have to contend both with the evils of fortune, and with the evils of our own depravity, and it is only he who can in some measure overcome both, that is to be esteemed the wise, the virtuous, and the happy man. At the same time, amidst the evils of different kinds which assault us, there is a principle of good derived from Heaven, by which we may hope to acquire strength, and through Divine assistance be enabled to overcome the evils of our state. This is the subject of the exhortation in the text, *Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.* Taken in its most extensive sense, as respecting the different kinds of evil, which we have to overcome, the exhortation may be understood to comprise the three following particulars. In the first place, Be not overcome by the injuries you meet with in the world, so as to pursue revenge. Secondly, Be not overcome by the disasters of the world, so as to sink into despair. Thirdly, Be not overcome by the evil examples of the world, so as to follow them into sin. But in all those cases, *overcome evil with good.* Overcome injuries, by forgiveness. Overcome disasters, by fortitude. Overcome evil examples, by firmness of principle.

I. Be not overcome by the injuries you meet with in the world, so as to pursue revenge. It appears from the context, that this was the primary object which the Apostle had in his view in this exhortation. He refers to the injuries which the primitive Christians were con-

stantly suffering from their persecutors. Instead of being so much overcome by these as to be intent on revenge, his exhortation in the verses preceding the Text is, *Dear! beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath; for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, saith the Lord. Therefore, if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst, give him drink; for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head. Be not overcome of evil; but overcome evil with good.* But it is not in times only of persecution and general distress, that this exhortation is needful. We must in every state of society reckon upon meeting with unreasonable men, and encountering their bad usage. This is one of the evils inseparable from our present state. No station is so high, no worth so distinguished, no innocence so inoffensive, as to secure us entirely against it. Sometimes the violence of enemies, sometimes the ingratitude of friends, will ruffle our spirits. Where we think that we have merited praise, we will be in hazard of meeting reproach. Envy will rise unprovoked; and calumny, from its secret place, will dart its envenomed shafts against the most deserving. Such is the consequence of the present depravity of our nature, and of the disordered state in which human affairs lie. — The fondness of self-love is always apt to amuse us with too flattering prospects of what life is to produce for us, beyond what it produces for others. Hence our impatience and irritation upon every injury we suffer; as if some new and unheard-of thing had befallen us; and as if we alone were privileged to pass through the world, untouched by any wrong. Whereas, if we were disciplined to think of the world, and of the tempers of those around us, as a wise man ought to think, the edge of this impatience would be taken off. When we engage in any undertaking, we ought to say to ourselves, that in the course of it we will have to do, more or less, with selfish, crafty, unprincipled men. These men will naturally act as their evil nature prompts them. They are the thorns and brambles that we must expect to encumber and to gall us in many of the paths of life. We must not hope to *reap grapes of thorns, nor figs of thistles*. Wild dogs will naturally bark; and beasts of prey naturally seek to devour.

Now, when thus situated, how are we to act for overcoming the evils we have already endured, or are in hazard of still farther enduring from others? To provide for safety and defence, is unquestionably allowable and wise. But are we also to lay plans for future revenge? — Were this the course to be followed, what would the consequence be, but to render the life of man a state of constant hostility, where provocations and resentments, injuries and retaliations, would succeed one another without end; till the world became like a den of wild beasts, perpetually attacking and devouring one another? No, says the Apostle, *overcome evil with good*. Disarm and overcome your enemies, by forgiveness and generosity. This is the principle of good, which you are to oppose to their evil. Teach them thereby, if not to love, at least to honour and respect you. While you take proper precautions for present safety, provide for the future, not by studied plans of revenge, but by fortitude of mind,

by prudent behaviour, and superiour virtue. Herein you show no unmanly tameness or cowardice. Religion means not to suppress the proper feelings of honour, nor the sense which every man ought to have of dignity of character, and the rights which belong to him. These may be supported to the full, without a mean thirst for revenge, and a fierce desire of returning evil for evil.

By the magnanimity of forgiveness, you gain an important victory in overcoming, not perhaps your enemy, but your own wrathful and violent passions. Whereas he, who in such conjunctures knows no other method of proceeding, but that of gratifying resentment, is, in truth, the person who is overcome. For he has put it in the power of his enemy to overthrow his repose, and to gail and embitter his mind. By forgiving and despising injuries, you assume a superiority over your adversary, which he will be obliged to feel. Whereas, if you allow his provocations to blow you up into fierce revenge, you have given him the advantage. You confess yourself hurt and sore. His evil has overcome your good. He has fixed a dart within you, which in vain you endeavour to pull out; and by the attempts you make, you only exasperate and inflame the sore. Seldom is there any punishment which revenge can inflict, more severe than is suffered by him who inflicts it. The bitterness of spirit, the boilings of fierce passions, joined with all the black ideas which the cruel plans of revenge excite, produce more acute sensations of torment, than any that are occasioned by bodily pain. — When bad men have behaved injuriously toward us, let us leave them to themselves, and they will be sufficiently punished by their own vices. Their wickedness is no reason why we should render ourselves unhappy, or afford them the gratification of having it in their power to deprive us of peace. — I shall only add farther on this head, that a passion for revenge has been always held to be the characteristic of a little and mean mind. Never was any man distinguished as a hero, or recorded in the annals of history as a great man, to whom this quality of generous forgiveness of evil did not conspicuously belong. We know how eminently it shone in the character of Him whom we justly venerate as the model of all perfection; whose dying breath was employed in apologizing and praying for those who were shedding his blood.

II. BE not overcome by the misfortunes of life, so as to sink into despair. This is another view of that *evil* which we are called upon to *overcome by good*; and is the sense in which *evil* is most generally understood, and is most dreaded by men. Although by inoffensive and blameless behaviour we should escape, in a great degree, from the injuries of bad men; yet, to escape altogether from the stroke of misfortune and distress, is what none of us can expect. In one way or other, in our person, or fortune, or families and friends, it is the doom of all, more or less, to suffer. From what causes this appointment of Providence arises, and to what purposes it is rendered subservient, it belongs not to our subject at present to inquire; the fact is too certain and obvious. — The principle of good which we must oppose to those evils of our lot, and by means of which we may hope to overcome them, is inward fortitude grounded on religion

and trust in God; forming that state of mind, which, resting on itself, and the witness of a good conscience, rises superiour to the trials of the world.

When the sky begins to lour around thee; when thy gay prospects begin to disappear, thy friends to fail, or thy fortune to decline; or when, as years advance, the chief comforts on which thy heart was set, and on which thou hadst conceived thy happiness to depend, are unexpectedly cut off; say not then within thyself, "The evil time has now overtaken me; the gates of hope are all shut: the days are come wherein I shall have no pleasure; enjoyment is fled; nothing remains for me now, but to close my days in melancholy, to despair, and to die."—This is to be *overcome of evil* indeed. He who thus allows himself to sink under the misfortunes of life, dishonours the character of a man, still more that of a Christian. He shows that whatever plausible appearances he may at former times have made before the world, at bottom he not only wanted strength and firmness of mind, but was deficient also in religious faith and principle. For it is impossible that he who allows himself to be so entirely overcome by the evils of the world, can entertain just notions of God, and of his government of the world. He hath cast aside all reliance on Providence, and set at nought the promises of the Gospel. He may suppress all outward expressions of impious discontent; he may even affect the language of resignation; but his heart in secret will murmur and repine against the Lord.

These, therefore, are the occasions when it particularly behoves us to call to mind all those principles which should assist us so to possess our minds in patience, as to overcome evil with good.—Recal, my brethren, all the former experience you have had of the goodness of the Almighty, and the ground which this affords for trust and hope in him now. Recal to remembrance all the promises he has made to good men; as the words of Him *who changes not; who is not a man that he should lie, nor the son of man that he should repent*. Recollect the general tenour of that Providence, whose course it has ever been, since the creation of the world, so to chequer the life of men with unforeseen vicissitudes, as often to make unexpected goods succeed evils; nay, to make them spring from evils. Recollect, that whatever fortune may rob you of, it cannot take away what is most valuable, the peace of a good conscience, the pleasing sense of having acted honourably and done your duty, and the cheering prospect of a happy conclusion to all the trials of life in a better world. Consider, that, as long as virtue remains, there are always, even in the most unfavourable situations, some comforts still left open, did we not overlook them. For it is seldom or never that all good things forsake a man at once, and all evils overtake him together. If he is bereaved of some friends whom he tenderly loved, there are others yet remaining to whom he may look for comfort. If, by infirmity, or old age, he be excluded from the enjoyments of active life, the gratifications which leisure and repose afford, are still left to him. If his fortune be shattered, and poverty threaten to beset him, yet, even in very straitened circumstances, many of the simple and best pleas-

asures of nature, and many of the satisfactions of social life, can still be enjoyed. Nay, the mind of a good man can still be a kingdom to itself; and though confined in a prison, or stretched on a sick-bed, peaceful and pleasing thoughts will occasionally arise to him, and fair prospects of futurity will present themselves to his view.

Assisted by such considerations as these, let us enliven faith, strengthen patience, and animate hope, till we be enabled to *overcome evil with good*: always looking forward to better days; nourishing trust in the gracious government of the universe; and listening to him who hath said of old, and who still says to all his servants, *Fear not, for I am with thee; be not afraid, for I am thy God. Call upon me in the day of trouble, and I will answer thee; wait on the Lord, be of good courage; and he shall strengthen your hearts, all ye that wait upon the Lord.*

III. **BE** not overcome by the evil examples of the world, so as to follow them into sin. This undoubtedly is one of the most dangerous evils which good men are called to overcome; and where it is most difficult to gain the victory. He who, in the former instances that have been mentioned, can *overcome evil with good*; who can generously forgive injuries, and magnanimously bear up under misfortunes, will be often in hazard of being overcome by evil, under this form. After having maintained his ground against many a rough blast, he may be in danger of being betrayed by a flattering gale in the days of his ease and prosperity; of being insensibly carried down the stream by that multitude of evil-doers who surround and deceive him. For the character of the world too certainly is, that it *lieth in wickedness*. Fashions of vice may change with the times. In one age, one set of corrupt habits may prevail; and in another, the passions of men may take a different turn. But, in every age, the multitude of men will be prone to indulge vicious desires. On the surface of behaviour, vice may be disguised under a plausible and polished appearance, while at bottom there lies the poisoned root of evil. Pleasure will ever captivate the young and unthinking. Riches and advancement ensnare the more sober and stayed. Attached to their different pursuits, and connecting with them the ideas of wisdom and importance, the multitude will ridicule those who go not along with them, as formal and precise, as raw uneducated, and ignorant of the world. Assailed by such reproaches, the timid become afraid; the modest are abashed; the complaisant and good-natured submit to their supposed friends. They begin to imagine that the general opinion of the world cannot but have some reason on its side; and, half seduced by persuasion, half compelled by ridicule, they surrender their former convictions, and consent to live as they see others around them living.

Such are the evils which we must study to overcome by good, if we wish to be esteemed either honourable men, or faithful Christians. And how are we to overcome them? *This is the victory*, says the Apostle John, *that overcometh the world, even our faith*.* It is the steadiness of firm and rooted principle, of belief in God and Christ,

* 1 John, v. 4.

of belief in the everlasting importance of religion and virtue, which you are to oppose to the host of evil-doers.—Consider, I beseech you, that no fashions nor opinions of men can affect that unalterable law of God, which rests on the eternal basis of rectitude and truth. Men, if they please, may call evil, good,—and good, evil; but as they cannot change the nature of things, their voice gives no sanction to any plan of conduct as right and wise.* So far are you from having any chance of holding either a wise or a safe course by going along with the multitude, that he who implicitly follows them may be justly presumed to be in the path of error and of danger. For in every age the multitude have inquired superficially, have judged rashly, and acted inconsiderately. Concurrence with general practice neither affords justification of conduct, nor promises impunity in what is evil. The righteous Lord of all will never suffer his laws to be subjected to the capricious fancies of his creatures. Transgressors will neither be screened by their numbers, nor escape by being hidden in a crowd.

In times, therefore, when corruption is prevalent, when vice under any of its modes is fashionable, we are particularly called upon to show that we have within us a *good*, which we can oppose to this *evil*; to show that we have fixed principles of our own, which we will surrender to no man, but upon which we will act, and will stand by them to the last. It ought to be no part of our character, that we seek to distinguish ourselves by affected austerity, and a marked singularity in frivolous and insignificant matters. Our distinction must rest upon a steady adherence to rational religion and the uncontrollable rules of virtue, when the multitude around us, whether the high or the low, are deviating into licentious and criminal conduct. Depend upon it you may, that even that multitude, though they may attempt to turn you into ridicule, honour you at the bottom of their hearts. They will be compelled to acknowledge, or at least to feel, whether they acknowledge it or not, that your unshaken firmness in what you esteem to be honourable and worthy, must proceed from some principle within, of a higher nature than that from which they act. At any rate, by thus maintaining in every situation the cause of religion and truth, and thereby overcoming evil with your good, you shall obtain honour from the great Judge of the earth, and your reward shall be great in Heaven.

Thus, in several important instances, I have shown how the exhortation in the Text is to be complied with, and in what manner our good should overcome evil; overcoming injuries by generous forgiveness; overcoming misfortunes by patience and resignation; overcoming the temptations of evil examples by steady adherence to conscience and duty. In many of these cases, the conflict we are called to maintain may be arduous and difficult; inclined, as we too often are, by the bent of our nature, to the evil side. But, if we wish and desire to do well, let us not be discouraged, nor despair of victory. Weak in ourselves, we have ground to be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might. For the prin-

* See this subject fully discussed in Sermon. LXIX.

ciple of godd, feeble though it may be at present in human nature, is never left unbefriended by God. It is a principle derived from Heaven, and partakes of heavenly efficacy. If it once take root in the soul, it will be made to arise and grow from small beginnings into gradual maturity, under his protection and influence from whom its origin came. To them who have no might, it is written, *he increaseth strength.** The contest between sin and righteousness, which at present takes place in the world, is a struggle between God and Belial, between the powers of light and the kingdom of darkness; and in this state of things we must easily discern to which side the final victory will belong. Let us endeavour to do our duty, and God will be with us. Let us sincerely study to overcome evil with good, and we shall overcome it. Our feeble powers shall be aided by divine might, and our imperfect services crowned with divine rewards. *They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.*†

SERMON LXXXIII.

ON A LIFE OF DISSIPATION AND PLEASURE.

PROVERBS, xiv. 13.

Even in laughter the heart is sorrowful; and the end of that mirth is heaviness.

PAINS and sorrows occur so frequently in human life, that it is not surprising that the multitude of men should eagerly court scenes of pleasure and joy. It is natural to seek relief from our cares, by whatever promises to substitute hours of gladness in the place of anxiety and trouble. But we have much reason to beware, lest a rash or unwary pursuit of pleasure defeat its end, lest the attempt to carry pleasure too far, tend, in the issue, to sink us into misery. *There is a way,* says the wise man in the verse preceding the Text, *which seemeth right unto a man: but the end thereof are the ways of death.* There is a certain course of life which a man may have chosen to adopt, as leading to gladness and enjoyment; but which he shall find at last to be destructive of his happiness: for all is not real gladness, which has the appearance of being such. *There is a laughter, in the midst of which the heart is sorrowful, and a mirth, the end whereof is heaviness.*

From serious admonitions of this kind given in Scripture, it would be very unjust to infer, that religion is an enemy to all mirth and gaiety. It circumscribes our enjoyments indeed, within the bounds of temperance; but, as far as this sacred limit permits, it gives free scope to all the gratifications of life. It even heightens their relish to a virtuous man. It enlivens his cheerfulness, and allows him to

* Isaiah, xl. 29.

† Isaiah, xl. 31.

enjoy with satisfaction all that prosperity affords him. The Text is applicable only to that set of men to whom temperance is no restraint; who propose to themselves the unlimited enjoyment of amusement and pleasure in all their forms, as the sole object and business of life.

Such persons, too frequently to be met with in the age wherein we live, have utterly mistaken the nature and condition of man. From the participation of pleasure, as I just now observed, he is far from being excluded. But let him remember, that a mediocrity only of enjoyment is allowed him, for his portion on earth. He is placed in a world, where, whatever his rank or station be, a certain part is allotted him to act; there are duties which are required of him; there are serious cares which must employ his mind, how to perform properly the various offices of life, and to fill up the place which belongs to him in society. — He who, laying aside all thoughts and cares of this kind, finding himself in the possession of easy or affluent fortune, and in the bloom of life, says within himself, “What have I to do, but to seek out every pleasure and amusement which the world can afford me? Let others toil in the common walks of life, who have to make their fortunes by sober and dull application. But to me labour is superfluous, the world is open. Wherever amusement invites, or pleasure calls, there I go. By passing my days and nights in whatever can entertain my fancy or gratify my senses, life shall, to me, be rendered delightful.” — He, I say, who thinks thus, vainly endeavours to counteract the intention of nature, and the decree of Providence. He attempts to render his state on earth, what it was never designed to be. He might as well expect that the physical laws of nature should be altered on his account; and that, instead of being confined to walk like ordinary men on the ground, he should obtain the privilege of treading on the air, as expect to enjoy a state of perpetual pleasure, by devoting himself to pleasure wholly, and setting aside all the serious cares and duties of life. Troubles, he may be well assured, are prepared for him, and await him. Where he expected satisfaction, he shall meet with disappointment; and in him shall be verified the saying in the Text, that *even in laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.* — But lest, to persons of this description, such general reasoning, from the established constitution of Providence, may not be satisfactory, I proceed to show them how clearly it is confirmed by facts. For this purpose let us observe,

In the first place, The obvious consequences of a life of pleasure and dissipation, to health, fortune, and character. To each of these, it is an enemy, precisely according to the degree to which it is carried. — Character is soon affected by it. As the man of dissipation often makes his appearance in public, his course is marked, and his character is quickly decided, by general opinion, according to the line which he is observed to pursue. By frivolity and levity, he dwindles into insignificance. By vicious excesses, or criminal pleasures, he incurs disapprobation or contempt. The fair prospects which his friends had once entertained of him die away, in proportion as his idleness or extravagance grows; and the only hope which

remains is, that some fortunate incident may occur to check his career, and reclaim him to a better mind. In the mean time, the respectable and the grave smile at his follies, and avoid his company. In the midst of some fashionable assemblies he may shine; by some of his fellows he may be admired; but in the world he is of no significance or consequence, any more than the little animals that sport around him. — Health, the most valuable of all temporal blessings, is known to be preserved by temperance and a regular life. But, by the men of dissipation, it is readily sacrificed at the shrine of pleasure. To years of health and soundness, they are often so foolish as to prefer a few hours of sensual gratification. Supposing that no extravagant excesses, or vicious pleasures, cut short their health and life, yet what constitution can stand the irregular hours, the disorderly living, the careless indulgence, into which the love of pleasure draws those who devote themselves to it? Hence the shattered and debilitated body, and the premature old age. The native vigour and sprightliness of youth is melted down by effeminacy and sensuality. The spirits are weakened and enervated, if not sunk and lost for ever. — The state of their fortune may, for a while, enable them to indulge their pleasures, and to maintain the figure they wish to keep up in the world; but let fortune be ever so affluent, in the possession of such persons, it is in the high road to decay. For to them, attention to business, or to the management of their affairs, becomes a burden, which they studiously shun. Prudent economy is disdained, as a mean attention, belonging only to vulgar and narrow minds. Their habits of licentiousness require unlimited indulgence. The demands of passion must be immediately supplied, whatever the consequences be. Hence, delivering themselves up to those who can furnish supply for their expence, or who pretend to take charge of their affairs, they become the prey of the crafty, who fatten on their spoils; till at last, in the midst of thoughtless extravagance, and of general waste and confusion, they see nothing remaining to them but the ruins of a broken fortune.

Such are some of the miseries attending habits of dissipation, and the intemperate love of pleasure. We see them daily exemplified in the world, throughout all the stages of this character, from the frivolous and the giddy, up to the rake and the profligate; in some stages, only impairing health and fortune; in others, entirely overthrowing them; in their beginnings, casting a shade on the characters of men; in their completion, exposing them to disgrace and misery. — Even abstracting from those ultimate consequences in which irregular pleasures terminate, the gratification which, in the mean time, they bestow, is dearly paid for. A temporary satisfaction, it is admitted, they afford. They raise the spirits to a degree of elevation above their usual tone, but in that forced elevation they can never long remain; and in proportion to the elevation to which they were raised, is the degree of depression to which they subside. Experience has shown, that no sensual pleasure, except what is regulated by temperance, can be lasting. Every pleasure that is carried beyond it is no more than a momentary explosion; a transient

gush; a torrent that comes down impetuously, sparkling and foaming in its course, but that soon runs out, and leaves a muddy and polluted channel. Who knows not the languor and dejection that follow every excessive indulgence of pleasure, or a long continuation of amusement of any kind? From whom do we hear such frequent complaints of low spirits, as from those who spend most of their time in the circles of dissipation and gaiety, or in the revelry of the world? To what wretched and pernicious resources are they obliged to fly, in order to recruit their spirits, and restore some life to their deadened sensations? What melancholy spectacles do they at length exhibit of a worn-out frame, and an exhausted mind? So well-founded is the assertion in the Text, that there is *death, the end of which is heaviness.*

LET us consider, in the second place, The ruin which a life of pleasure and dissipation brings upon the moral state and character of men, as well as on their external condition. This deserves the more attention, as the pursuit of pleasure sometimes sets out at the beginning with a fair and innocent appearance. It promises to bestow satisfactions unknown to a duller race of mortals; and, at the same time, to allow virtue and honour to remain. With a great part of mankind, especially with those who are most likely to run the race of pleasure, such as are well-born, and have been regularly educated, some attachment to good principles at first is found. They cannot as yet bear the reproach of any thing that is dishonourable or base. Regard to their word, generosity of sentiment, attachment to their friends, and compassion for the unhappy, prevail for a while in their hearts. — But, alas! as the love of pleasure gains ground, with what insidious steps does it advance towards the abolition of all virtuous principles? It has been ever found, that without the assistance of reflection, and of serious thought, virtue cannot long subsist in the human mind. But to reflection and serious thoughts, the men of dissipation are strangers. Absorbed, as they are, in the whirlpool of fashionable life, and hurried along by a rapid succession of amusements, reflection is lost, and good impressions gradually decay. Nothing is regarded but present enjoyment, and plans of improving on that enjoyment in future. As their taste, and their acquired habits, carry them into the society of licentious company, they must follow the more trained votaries of pleasure who naturally take the lead. They become assimilated to the manners of their loose associates; and, without perceiving it themselves, their whole character by degrees is changed. Former restraints are now laid aside; and, in order to preserve the rank of equality with their companions in every expence, prodigality is the necessary consequence. Prodigality presently opens a way to the worst vices. They become both covetous and profuse; profuse in spending, but covetous to acquire. In order to carry on the splendour of life, and to indulge their inclinations to the full, they now submit to what, at their first outset in life, they would have rejected as mean and base. Now is the creditor defrauded; the tenant racked and oppressed; the tradesman frustrated of the reward of his honest industry; and friends and rela-

tions, on whom any impression can be made, are plundered without mercy. — In this manner all the bland and smiling appearances which mirth and gaiety once carried, are transformed into the blackest shapes of vice; and, from a character originally stamped only with giddiness and levity, shoots forth a character compounded of dishonesty, injustice, oppression, and cruelty.

Is there any one who will deny, that the intemperate pursuit of pleasure leads frequently into all the vices now mentioned, and that some of them it carries always in its train? I shall not dwell on certain crimes, which none but the most atrocious devotees of pleasure will pretend to justify, though all who partake of that character make too light of them; such as, the violation of the marriage-bed, the seduction of the innocent, and the introduction of misery into families once happy and flourishing. These are crimes that require the interposition of the lawgiver and the judge, more than the admonition of the preacher. — Let us only think for a little of that reproach of modern times, that gulf of time and fortune, the passion for gaming, which is so often the refuge of the idle sons of pleasure, and often also the last resource of the ruined. To how many bad passions, to how many base arts, does it give rise? What violent agitations of the mind, sometimes bursting into rage and frenzy, does it occasion? What a shameful traffic of gain does it form among persons, whom their rank in life, and their connexions in society, ought to have raised above the thoughts of enriching themselves by such dishonourable means? How many friendships has it broken? How many families has it ruined? In what deadly catastrophes has it often terminated? The gamester sits down at the fatal table with eager spirits and mighty hopes. Behold him when he rises, — a wretch, haggard and forlorn, cursing his fate, and, from despair of retrieving his ruined fortune, driven perhaps to entertain the horrid thought of ending his own existence! — Dismissing so melancholy a theme, let us,

In the third place, Attend to the disquieting sensations which are apt to intrude upon the men of pleasure, even in the midst of their enjoyments. Not only is the *end of their mirth heaviness*, but in *laughter*, as it is expressed in the Text, *the heart is sorrowful*. Often is laughter affected, when the heart is galled within. A show of mirth is put on to cover some secret disquiet. When you enter into a gay and festive assembly, you behold every appearance of sparkling felicity. Alas! could you look into the breasts of this seemingly happy company, how inconsiderable would the proportion be found of those who were truly happy! how great the proportion of those who, either in their minds, were entirely vacant and languid; or who fled to scenes of gaiety in order to fly from themselves, from domestic uneasiness, or corroding cares, and, in the tumult of company and forced mirth, to drown their sorrows! — At the best, the flashes of joy, which burst from the dissipated and careless, are of a transient and broken kind, interrupted by reflections which they cannot altogether avoid. For, at the bottom of the hearts of most men, even amidst an irregular life, there lies a secret feeling of propriety, a sense

of right and wrong in conduct. This inward sense is frequently so much borne down by appetites and passions, as to lose its power of guiding men to what is right, while yet it retains as much influence as to make them sensible that they have been doing wrong; that they have not acted that part in life which they ought to have acted, and which their friends, and the world, had a title to expect from them. Though conscience be not strong enough to guide, it still has strength to dart a sting. — Together with this consciousness of ill desert, there will be at some times joined a humbling sense of their own insignificancy, when they behold others meeting with esteem and honour for having acted a manly and worthy part in life. Their superiority they are obliged to acknowledge, and to look up to them with respect; while the retrospect of their own life affords nothing but shame, and the bitter remembrance of time they have mis-spent, and opportunities they have thrown away. — In the midst too of mortifying reflections of this kind, it will not be in their power to escape altogether from a dread of certain consequences which are in hazard of befalling from their careless conduct. Scarcely is any fortune so stable as to be beyond the reach of accidents that will diminish it. To none so readily as to the men of pleasure, are such accidents likely to happen; and fond as they are of their present superb train of living, the dread that it may not be in their power always to continue it, will, in spite of all their endeavours to avoid such thoughts, occasionally force itself upon them, and cast a cloud over many a scene of projected merriment.

Can you reckon that to be sincere joy, which is liable to be interrupted and mingled with so many sensations of the most disagreeable nature? In the cup of intemperance, or in the tumult of loose society, the man of pleasure studies to drown them. But often his efforts are vain. When he pushes to the utmost his scenes of criminal revelry, they will carry the resemblance of Belshazzar's feast; at which, while the impious monarch was drinking amongst his lords and concubines, he beheld the fingers of a man's hand writing in unknown characters on the wall over against him; *and his countenance changed, and his heart sunk within him.** Thus, in the midst of riot, imagined spectres have been known to haunt the man of guilty pleasure. He sees hands coming forth to write on the wall against him. The very portraits of his ancestors, which hang in his hall, appear to him to look with frowning aspect, and to upbraid him with wasting in licentious pleasures the fortune which their honourable labours or virtuous industry had acquired. — Of all the classes of sinners, it has been found, that none are so liable, in some period of their lives, or at least when life is drawing to its close, to be smitten with severe remorse, as those who have sacrificed to pleasure all the calls of conscience and of duty.

LET us consider, in the last place, How unsuitable a life of dissipation and pleasure is to the condition of man in this world, and how injurious to the interests of society. In the world, we are surrounded with scenes of distress. We behold the greatest part of the human

* Dan. v. 6.

race doomed to hard labour and penurious subsistence. We hear the cries of indigence. We know that every day thousands are yielding up their breath, and thousands are attending their dying friends. Our own lives are fleeting fast away. Flourishing as our state may at present seem, we know there is but a step between us and death. The youngest and the healthiest cannot tell whether they may not, within the space of a few days, be called to undergo the judgment of God. — Is this a time, is this a place, where no other thing is to be pursued but giddy amusement and perpetual pleasure? Have you, my friends, who are spending your days in this wanton abuse of prosperity, no sense of the unsuitableness of such conduct to the condition of mortal man? Do you see nothing in the state of human life to chasten and temper your mirth; to bring serious reflections home to your bosom; to admonish you that it is better to go sometimes to the house of mourning, than to dwell always in the house of feasting? — Do you feel no compunction at the thought that, by your luxury and extravagance, you are adding to the scenes of sorrow which already abound in this afflicted world? For you, and your follies, the aged parent, or the respectable relation, mourn. To supply the oppressive demands of your pleasures, families are driven from their habitations, and left to poverty and want. Your mirth forces the widow and the fatherless to weep. — At the same time, you are scattering poison in society around you. You are corrupting the public manners by the life which you lead. You are propagating follies and vices; and by the example which you set, are ensnaring many to follow you into ruin. — Consider with how much discontent and indignation the poorer classes of men, all the while, behold you. Especially, if in times of scarcity and of war, such as those in which I now write, they see you indulging in wastefulness and thoughtless profusion, when they and their families are not able to earn their bread. As long as wealth is properly employed, persons in low situations naturally look up to their superiours with respect. They rest contented in their station. They are even disposed to bless the hand which furnishes them with employment on reasonable terms, and occasionally dispenses seasonable relief. But if they feel themselves oppressed, merely that a few may be enabled to squander at pleasure, and to revel in wasteful excess, their discontents are not easily suppressed. With sullen murmurs they issue from their impoverished habitations, prepared for every evil work.

SUCH are some of the consequences which flow from dissipation and the intemperate love of pleasure. Let not the effect of what has been said be frustrated by this evasion, that although the descriptions which have been given be just and true, yet they are applicable only to such as have carried their pursuit of pleasure to the most criminal excess; a class, in which few, if any, will admit that they deserve to be ranked. — They who are only beginning the course of vicious pleasure, and who sin within prescribed bounds, may reckon with certainty on their bearing a share of the evils and miseries which I have described. Not only so, but having once entered on an irregular course, they cannot tell where they are to stop. They have drunk

from the cup of the enchantress; and being fairly brought within the magic circle, their powers of reflection are laid asleep, and to make an escape may not be in their power.

To some, it may perhaps appear, that the whole strain of this Discourse refers only to the rich and the great; and that persons of moderate fortune, and of the middle ranks of life, who form the great body of society, have little or no concern in it. But this is entirely a mistake. Splendid fortune, and high birth or rank, afford, beyond doubt, the strongest and most frequent temptations to the loose indulgence of every enjoyment. But throughout all ranks the danger extends, of being misled by pleasure in some of its forms. In this country, where wealth and abundance are so much diffused over all stations; where it is well known that the inferiour orders of men are perpetually pressing upon those who are above them, and following them in their manners, a life of dissipation is perhaps not less frequent among the middle, than among the higher classes of society. The modes of amusement may not be so refined. The entertainments and pleasures may be of a grosser kind. But in many an inferiour circle, there prevails as much love of pomp and show, as much proportional extravagance in expence, as much rivalry in the competition of passions and pleasures, as in the most fashionable and courtly assemblies. Sober reflections are as much laid aside; the gratification of vanity, and the indulgence of pleasure, are pursued with equal eagerness. — Let us therefore, my brethren, in whatever rank of life we are placed, proceed upon this as our great principle, that to serve God, to attend to the serious cares of life, and to discharge faithfully the duties of our station, ought to be the first concern of every man who wishes to be wise and happy; that amusement and pleasure are to be considered as the relaxation, not the business, of life; and that if from those sentiments we depart, and give ourselves up to pleasure as our only object, *even in laughter the heart shall be sorrowful, and the end of our mirth shall be heaviness.*

SERMON LXXXIV.

ON THE CONSCIENCE VOID OF OFFENCE.

ACTS, xxiv. 16.

Herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men.

THESE words were spoken by the Apostle Paul, in the course of that manly and spirited defence which he made for himself, when accused of sedition and impiety before Felix, the Roman Governour. He vindicates himself from the charges brought against him; but boldly avows his principles, conceals no part he had acted, gives up no doctrine he had taught, and, with the firm consciousness of innocence, appeals to his enemies themselves for the unblemished integrity of his life and character.

To maintain *always a conscience void of offence toward God and toward men*, is a degree of virtue, to which, in its full extent, none can lay claim. For who is there among the sons of men that can pretend, on every occasion, throughout his whole life, to have preserved a faultless conduct? How few days, indeed, go over our heads wherein something does not pass, in which our behaviour has not been altogether correct, or free from every offence? In the present imbecility and fallen state of human nature, he is the worthiest person who is guilty of the fewest offences towards God or towards man. But though the character referred to in the Text be not attainable by us in a complete degree, it is the character to which we must all study to approach, to come as near to it as the weakness of our nature admits; so that neither in *piety towards God*, nor in *social duties towards men*, we may be found remarkably deficient. — You will observe, that this great Apostle does not boast of having fully attained to a conscience void of every offence. His words are, that *herein he exercised himself*; that is, this was his object and his study, to this he formed and trained himself, to have *always a conscience void of offence towards God and men*. — Assuredly, there is nothing in human life more amiable and respectable than such a character. Wherever it appears, it commands universal reverence in every station, whether high or low. It is indeed what all men would wish to gain; at least, they wish that others should believe them to possess it. Even the most corrupted look to it, from afar, with a sigh; and however obliged to condemn themselves for having fallen short of it, cannot help esteeming and respecting others who are dignified by the attainment of it. — Let us then consider, first, what is implied in *exercising* or *forming* ourselves to maintain the conscience void of offence; and next, what the effects will be of having, in some degree, attained it.

I. In *exercising* ourselves for this purpose, our first care must be to have our conscience well informed, or properly instructed, as to what is, or is not, a real ground of offence towards God or towards men. Conscience is the guide, or the enlightening and directing principle of conduct; and as our Saviour has warned us, *If the light which is in thee be darkness, how great will that darkness be?** If that which should guide us be itself misled, how widely must we wander astray? — There are two extremes here, to each of which, different sets of men are apt erroneously to incline. One set of men are apt to be minutely scrupulous about matters of smaller importance; *tithing*, as the Scripture describes them, *mint, anise, and cummin*, while they neglect the weightier matters of the law. Punctual in their observance of all the forms and ceremonies of religion, they hope by this means to compensate for allowing themselves in unlawful pleasures or unrighteous gains. Another, and perhaps a more numerous set of men, err from loose casuistry in matters of moral duty. They admit the obligation they are under to virtuous practice; but they lay the whole stress of virtue on some particular good dispositions to which their temper inclines them. On these they highly value them-

* Matt. vi. 23.

selves; but breaches of other parts of duty, they are apt to consider as small and venial transgressions. They have balances of their own, in which they weigh every transgression; and if any of the offences they have committed, either against God or their neighbour, weigh light in the scale of fashion or general practice, they appear to them as scarcely any offences at all. — Both these extremes we must carefully guard against; and study to regulate our conduct by the pure unsophisticated laws of God; resting our character neither on a strict observance merely of the external forms of religion, nor on a partial regard to its moral duties; but attending to all that God has required from us as men and Christians. — The truth is, such errors as I have pointed out, always have their source in some corruption of the heart. It is not from inability to discover what they ought to do, that men err in practice. It is from some oblique regard to their interests or their pleasures, to their reputation or their gain, that they deviate into by-paths, while they affect to assume some appearance of principle. Fairness and uprightness of mind are the chief requisites for directing our conscience how to avoid offences towards God or man. He who, with an honest intention, seeks in every case to know what it is his duty to do, will seldom or never be at a loss to discover it.

IN the next place, It belongs to every one who studies to attain to a conscience void of offence, to make reparation for whatever wrong he is conscious of having formerly done. This is the most difficult, but at the same time the most satisfactory test, of our sincerity in desiring to have a clear conscience before God and man. How can he be sincere in this desire, who allows himself to remain quiet, while loaded with the sense that all he now enjoys has been obtained by injustice and fraud? If he continues, without remorse, to fatten upon the gains of unrighteousness; to feast on the spoils of the industrious; to revel in luxuries purchased by oppression or treachery; dare he hold up his face, and utter the name of Conscience? *Woe to him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by wrong.** In the midst of his stately habitation, *the stone, in the expressive language of Scripture, shall cry out of the wall against him; and the beam out of the timber shall answer it.†* — It may not be always in a man's power to make exact restitution of every unlawful gain he has acquired; but to make reparation to the utmost of his power, for every wrong he has done to others, is the duty of every one who lays any claim to principle or honesty. If this be entirely neglected, it is the mark of a conscience that is become dead to all sense of right and wrong. In vain we pretend to clear our conscience, by affecting to compensate for fraud or cruelty, either by acts of strict religious homage towards God, or by some partial virtues and shows of generosity towards men. With respect to men, we ought to learn that we must begin with being just, before we can attempt to be generous. With respect to God, we know that he delights in *mercy more than sacrifice*; and rejects with contempt the hypocritical worshipper. *I will come near to you in judgment, saith the Lord; and I will be a swift*

* Jer. xxii. 13.

† Habak. ii. 11.

*witness against those that oppress the hireling, the widow, and the fatherless, and that turn aside the stranger from his right. * — The Lord will plead their cause, and spoil the soul of those that spoiled them.*

AFTER making reparation for the wrongs he has committed, the next study of every one who is *exercising himself to have the conscience void of offence*, should be to guard against those particular snares which have formerly led him into evil. — If, for instance, covetousness has on many occasions tempted him to defraud or oppress, that he might increase his worldly store, it ought to be his first care to correct in future this inordinate passion for wealth, by bringing down in his estimation the acquisitions of fortune to their proper value; so that he may remain satisfied with a moderate share of the world's goods, and become sensible of what small importance great riches are to real happiness. If ambition has impelled him to rise into consideration by crooked policy and intrigues, let him impress his mind with all the considerations that will show him the emptiness and vanity of worldly honours. If a loose and careless life has brought him into habits of dissipation, and led him to neglect those religious duties which he owed to his Maker, let him return to the regular worship of God; and nourish an awful fear and reverence of that Almighty Being, on whom his all depends in time and eternity. — In this manner, it must be his care to begin, by eradicating those corruptions which, on different occasions, have tempted him to violate conscience. This study to reform all known errors in former life, will be one of the most satisfying marks of a sincere design to preserve in future a conscience void of offence. For if any of the old vitiated parts of the disposition be allowed to remain in their former state, in vain will any man apply himself to a thorough reformation of character. The favourite ruling passion, if it be suffered to keep its ascendancy, will not fail to drag the life after it.

In the last place, In order to carry on this discipline which I have been recommending for obtaining a good conscience, it will be highly necessary, that we frequently examine ourselves, and bring our conduct under review. No day ought to pass over our head, without some exercise of this kind. Every evening before we go to rest, we should subject to scrutiny the transactions in which we have been engaged. — What have I done this day, by which I may either have justly offended any man, or have shown neglect of God? What duty have I transgressed? Wherein have I omitted to act the part which my Maker, or my fellow-creatures, had a title to expect from me? — Be assured, my friends, that only by thus preserving conscience in the frequent exercise of its natural jurisdiction, you can support its rights. If you do not lead it in this manner often to assume its due station, its authority will gradually decline. There will be no accuracy in your moral conduct. Corruptions will grow upon you unawares. You will forget that you are creatures accountable for your actions, to a higher tribunal than that of the world. — It is a careless train of living, that is the general ruin of mankind. It is not so much from having adopted evil principles that men be-

come wicked, as from having adopted no principles at all. They follow their inclinations, without examining whether there be any principles which they ought to form for regulating their conduct. The chief corrective of this mischief is that which has been suggested; by bringing conscience into a frequent exercise of its power, and thereby awakening its authority over our life. — Bitterly it may, at times, reprove us for our sins and follies. Sharply it may sting. But those reproofs and those stings are salutary in their effect; and tend to prevent us from proceeding headlong in a downward course. If ever conscience become altogether dead and still, the symptom is ominous of our having contracted from hardened vice that mortal lethargy, from which we are only to be awakened at the day of judgment.

II. HAVING thus suggested some of the particulars which appear most essential in exercising or forming ourselves to attain to a conscience void of offence towards God and men, I come next to recommend this discipline by showing the happy effects it will produce. These happy effects are manifold; to avoid prolixity, I shall comprise them under two general heads. Such a clear conscience sets us free from the terrors of another world; it exempts us from a multitude of inquietudes in this.

FIRST, The conscience void of offence tends to procure freedom from the terrors of another world. Many, I know, in the gaiety of their hearts, pretend to make light of terrors of this kind; yet nothing is more certain, than that they are capable of assailing and dismaying the stoutest heart. Conscience is too great a power in the nature of man to be altogether subdued. It may for a time be repressed and kept dormant. But conjunctures there are in human life which awaken it; and, when once awakened, it flashes on the sinner's mind with all the horrors of an invisible Ruler and a future judgment. It has been so ordered by Providence, that it is always in the evil day, at the season when men stand most in need of consolation and support, that conscience exerts its vengeance on the guilty. I might mention what is suffered in the lonely hours of solitude and silence, when the sinner's mind is humbled and depressed by some recent disgrace, or some disappointment in his criminal pursuits. But let me only lead your thoughts to what must await us all, when we shall have arrived at the decline of life; when we feel the hand of death upon us, and cannot any more flatter ourselves that it will long delay giving the fatal stroke. *Sufficient, and more than sufficient, for that day will be the evil thereof*, even supposing that nothing within shall alarm us with dark forebodings of what is to follow. But if at the time when we are oppressed with sickness or pain upon our bed, distressed perhaps with the situation of our family and worldly affairs, and just about to take the last farewell of our friends and of all we have ever loved on earth; if, in the midst of this scene of distress, we shall be also tormented with the thought of what is to become of us in that next world which is just opening to our view; if we depart from life, conscious that we deserve punishment for the manner in which we have lived; and dreading that the hour of our being to receive that punishment is at hand; such a state of complicated misery

who can endure? *The spirit thus wounded and bleeding, when it is going forth from the body, who can bear?*

I by no means say, that he, who during his life has taken the greatest care to preserve his conscience void of offence, can upon that plea rest with confidence; or upon this ground alone leave this life without uneasiness or fear. No man's conscience was ever entirely clear from all reproach. We daily offend; and the best have much reason to implore mercy and forgiveness from their Judge. The whole strain of the Gospel tends to humble and depress those who vainly trust to their own imperfect righteousness. It teaches us that the ultimate ground on which we are to rest for acceptance with God, is the righteousness and merit of our great Redeemer. — But this I say, and testify to you, that the most satisfactory evidence you can possess, of having an interest in the Redeemer's merits, and being finally accepted through him, must arise from the testimony of a conscience, which you have studied to keep *void of offence towards God and towards men*. This will be the best proof of your belonging to the number of the sons of God. It will be the witness of the divine spirit within you; the day-star arising in your hearts, and preparing the approach of a more perfect day. — Without the study of attaining a good conscience, be assured that all other grounds of hope will prove fallacious: not the most fervent zeal, nor the highest pretences to intercourse with God, will be of any avail. They will have no more stability than the house built on the sand, which, in the day of trial, falls to the ground. He only whose conscience bears witness to his faithfulness, his integrity, and sincerity, in discharging all the duties of life, can, with a steady mind, and a firm but humble trust in his Saviour, look forward to all that awaits him in a future unknown world.

In the next place, While the conscience void of offence thus delivers us, in a great degree, from the terrors of a future life, it keeps us free, at the same time, from innumerable disquietudes in this life. All the offences for which conscience condemns us, become, in one way or other, sources of vexation. Never did any man long forsake the straight and upright path, without having cause to repent of it. Whether it be pleasure, or interest, or ambition, that leads him astray, he is always made to pay dear for any supposed advantage he gains. Warily and cautiously he may at first set out, and lay many restraints on himself against proceeding too far. But having once forsaken conscience as his guide, his passions and inclinations soon take the lead of his conduct, and push him forward rashly. One bad step betrays him into another; till, in the end, he is overtaken, if not by poverty and disease, at least by dishonour and shame, by the loss of friends, and the forfeiture of general esteem. *He who walketh uprightly*, has been always found to *walk surely*: while in the dark and crooked paths of fraud, dishonesty, or ignoble pleasure, a thousand forms of trouble and disaster arise to meet us. In the mean time, to a bad man, conscience will be always an uneasy companion. In the midst of his amusements, it will frequently break in upon him with reproach. At night, when he would go to rest, holding up to

him the deeds of the former day, putting him in mind of what he has lost and what he has incurred, it will make him often ashamed, often afraid. — Cowardice and baseness of mind are never failing concomitants of a guilty conscience. He who is haunted by it, dares never stand forth to the world, and appear in his own character. He is reduced to be constantly studying concealment, and living in disguise. He must put on the smiling and open look, when dark designs are brooding in his mind. Conscious of his own bad purposes, he looks with distrust on all who are around him, and shrinks from the scrutiny of every piercing eye. He sees, or fancies that he sees, suspicion in many a countenance: and reads upbraidings in looks where no upbraiding was meant. Often he *is in great fear, where no fear is*.

Very different from this, is the state of the man whose conscience is void of offence. He is manly and intrepid in every situation. He has never seduced the innocent by guilty arts. He has deluded no one with false promises. He has ensnared no man to trust him by a deceitful account of his affairs; nor taken any advantages of the distresses of others to enrich himself. Without uneasiness he can look every man boldly in the face; and say with the good Prophet Samuel; *Behold, here I am; witness against me. Whose ox have I taken? or, whose ass have I taken? or, whom have I defrauded? Whom have I oppressed? Of whose hand have I received any bribe? Declare, and I will restore it to you.** He who can thus take God and the world to witness for his integrity, may despise popular accusation or reproach. Those censures and rumours which are constantly disquieting the man of guilty conscience, pass by him unheeded. *His witness is in heaven; and his record is on high.* Innocence and uprightness form a tenfold shield, against which the darts of the world are aimed in vain. Of neither God as his Judge, nor of men as his companions, is such a man afraid. With no unquiet nor terrifying slumbers will his couch be haunted. *I will both lay me down in peace, and sleep; for the Lord maketh me dwell in safety.*

LET those considerations which have been now briefly suggested, contribute to render the character in the Text, *of a conscience void of offence towards God and man*, amiable and estimable in our eyes. If in its fullest extent we cannot attain to it, let us at least endeavour to approach to it, and herein with the great Apostle *exercise ourselves*. We may rest assured, that the more we partake of this character, the happier and more honourable shall our life be on earth, and the nearer shall it bring us to Heaven. Conscious of our innumerable frailties, let it be our daily prayer to God, that by his powerful spirit he would rectify what is corrupted in our nature; would guard us by his grace against the temptations that surround us; *keep us from the path of the destroyer, and lead us in his way everlasting.*

* 1 Sam. xii. 3.

SERMON LXXXV.

ON THE ASCENSION OF CHRIST.

[Preached in the Evening after the Celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.]

LUKE, xxiv. 50, 51.

And he led them out as far as to Bethany; and he lift up his hands and blessed them: And it came to pass while he blessed them, he was parted from them and carried up into Heaven.

THE sacred Scriptures not only set before us a complete rule of life, but give weight and authority to the precepts they deliver, by the information they communicate of certain great and important facts, in which all the human race have a deep concern. Of those facts one of the most illustrious is the ascension of our Saviour to Heaven, after having completed the work of our redemption. This is a subject on which it is at all times pleasing to a Christian to meditate; but especially after the celebration of that solemn ordinance in which we were this day engaged. We there renewed the memorial of our Saviour suffering and dying in the cause of mankind. Let us now take part in his succeeding triumphs. Let us with pleasure behold him rising from the grave, as the conqueror of death and hell, and ascending into heaven, there to reign in glory, and to act as the protector and guardian of his people, to the end of time. — It will be proper to begin with taking a particular view of all the circumstances that attended this memorable event in the history of our Saviour's life; as they are related in the Text, compared with the accounts of other Evangelists. The circumstances will all be found to be both beautiful and sublime in themselves, and instructive to us.

We are informed *, that it was not until forty days after his resurrection from the grave, that this event took place. During this space he had shown himself alive after his passion, by many infallible proofs, being often seen by his disciples, and conversing with them of things pertaining to the kingdom of God. All being now concluded which he had to do on earth; the guilt of mankind having been expiated by his death, and his Apostles fully instructed in the part they were henceforth to act, and the character they were to assume; one day, we are told, he led them out of the city as far as to Bethany. — With the utmost propriety was this place selected for the scene of his ascension. Near Bethany was the Mount of Olives, to which our Lord was wont so often to retire for the exercise of private devotion; and there also was the garden of Gethsemane, where his sufferings commenced with that agony in which his soul was exceeding sorrowful even unto death. At the spot where his generous sufferings on our account began, there also was his glory to commence; and those fields which so long had been his favourite retreat, and so often had been consecrated by him to meditation and prayer, were now to be

* Acts, i. 3.

dignified with his last and parting steps towards heaven; a sort of symbol, of devotion and virtuous sufferings being steps that prepare for ascent to heaven. — There, we are told, *He lift up his hands, and blessed his disciples; and while he blessed them, he was parted from them.* How beautiful is this attitude of our departing Lord! How well did such a conclusion suit the rest of his life! *Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them to the end.* While he lived, *he went about doing good:* He died, praying for his enemies; and when he ascended into heaven, it was in the act of lifting up his hands and blessing his friends; like a dying parent giving his last benediction to his children and family. A worthy pattern is here set before us, of the manner in which every good man should wish to spend his last moments, in acts of devotion to God, and expressions of kindness and affection to his friends. — While our Saviour was thus employed, he was *parted from his disciples; a cloud, it is said, received him out of their sight, and he was carried up into heaven.** Here were no whirlwinds, no thunders, no chariots of fire. Supernatural appearances of old, had been accompanied with majesty of a terrible kind. The law was given in the midst of lightnings and thunders. Elijah was caught up into heaven in a fiery chariot. But the Saviour of the world was gently *received up in a cloud;* with that sort of meek and calm magnificence, which bespeaks the peaceful genius of the Gospel and its Author. — Angels likewise assisted at this solemnity, as in every dispensation friendly to mankind these benevolent spirits are represented as taking part. At the creation of the world, *the morning stars, it is said, sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.†* At the birth of our Lord, we hear of their songs of praise and joy; we find them present at his resurrection from the dead; and now again at his ascension into heaven. *While his disciples looked stedfastly towards heaven, as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.‡*

SUCH were the circumstances which accompanied that great and signal event of Christ's ascension into heaven; all of them very solemn and striking, and calculated to leave a deep impression on the minds of his disciples. — Let us now proceed to consider the ends and purposes of our Saviour's ascension, as far as they are revealed and made known to us; and, together with them, the effects which ought thereby to be produced on our minds.

In the first place, By our Saviour's ascension into heaven, it was made to appear that the great design for which he descended to the earth was completely fulfilled. A solemn attestation was thus given by God, to the virtue and efficacy of that great sacrifice which he offered by his death for the sins of the world: It was declared that, in consideration of the high merits and generous sufferings of the Son of God, pardon and grace were to be extended to the fallen

* Acts, i. 9.

† Job, xxxviii. 7.

‡ Acts, i. 10, 11.

race of mén. Therefore, *God raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory, that our faith and hope might stand in God.*

Hence, the ascension of our Lord is to be considered as a display from heaven of the olive-branch to mankind. It is a most august ratification of that covenant of grace on which are founded all our hopes of acceptance with God. We lay under the sentence of condemnation as an offending guilty race, till Christ undertook our cause, and by his resurrection and ascension proved that he succeeded in what he had undertaken. As soon as he was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God, the terrors of the law were withdrawn. Ancient prophecies were fulfilled, which represented the coming of the Messiah as the renovation of the world, as the æra of declared grace and peace to mankind. The ascension of Christ was the signal of his triumph over all the powers of darkness. Long they had meditated our ruin, and maintained the reign of idolatry among the nations. But the period was now come when their power was to be overthrown. When Christ, as it was predicted of old by the inspired Psalmist, *ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. He then spoiled principalities and powers.** He destroyed him that had the power of death, that is the devil †; and the gifts which, as tokens of victory, he bestowed among his followers, were no less than peace, pardon, and eternal life. — While our Lord's ascension thus serves to establish our faith in the Gospel,

It is, in the next place, to be viewed by us, with respect to Christ himself, as a merited restoration to his original felicity. As the Son of God, all glory belonged to him for ever. The divine nature could neither suffer any real depression, nor receive any additional advancement. But it was as a man, that he appeared and acted on earth; that he suffered and died. What he had done in that character, entitled him, as a man, to the highest rewards. Accordingly it is in this view of merited recompence, that his ascension and exaltation at the right hand of God is always set forth in Scripture. Because *he made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant; and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross; wherefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name; that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow — and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. ‡* — In this constitution of Providence, an illustrious testimony was designed to be given of God's regard and love to eminent righteousness. *We see Jesus, as the Apostle speaks, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour. §* We see signal pre-eminence made the reward of signal condescension for the sake of making; and self-abasement and humiliation made the road to glory. We are taught, in this great instance, that God never deserts the cause that is his own, nor leaves worth and piety to be finally oppressed; though for a while he may allow trials and hardships to be undergone by the best men. No person could appear more neglected and forsaken by God, than

* Coloss. ii. 15.

† Heb. ii. 14.

‡ Philip. ii. 7, &c.

§ Heb. ii. 9.

our Saviour was, for a season, when in the hands of his foes. Important purposes of Providence were, during that season, carried on; but, as soon as those purposes were accomplished, God came forth in support of righteousness and truth, and by the high honours bestowed on Christ, established his eternal triumph over all his foes.

While we thus view our Saviour's ascension as a glorification justly merited on his own account, we cannot but on our part highly rejoice in it from a sense of the obligations we lie under to him. Devoid of every just and honourable sentiment must he be, who partakes not with cordial satisfaction in the success and triumph of a generous benefactor, who, for his sake, had exposed himself to much distress and danger. — In that holy Sacrament which we this day celebrated, we beheld our blessed Saviour despised and rejected of men; we saw him treated as the vilest of malefactors, led to the hill of Golgotha with scorn and contempt, and there undergoing all that the cruelty of his enemies could contrive to inflict. All this we beheld him patiently and cheerfully enduring for our sake, in order to accomplish our redemption. — Now, when at his next appearance we behold such a glorious revolution; when we behold him rising from the dead, ascending into the highest heavens, sitting down there at the right hand of God, and all things in heaven and earth made to bow before him, shall not we, my brethren, with thankful and devout hearts, partake joyfully in his exaltation and felicity? — Thou, O divine Benefactor! O illustrious Restorer of the lost hopes and happiness of mankind! Thou art most worthy to be thus raised above all beings. Our sorrows once were thine. *For our transgressions thou wert bruised; and for our iniquities, wounded.* Now, in thy joy we rejoice; and in thine honours we triumph. We with lifted hands will ever bless thee. Prostrate at thy feet, we will join with all the heavenly host in celebrating thy praises; in ascribing to *Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood*, all power, and glory, and dominion for ever!

In the third place, Christ ascended into heaven that he might act there, in the presence of God, as our High Priest and Intercessor. This office which he performs, was pre-signified under the Jewish dispensation, by the high priest entering once every year, on the great day of atonement, into the holiest place in the temple, and there sprinkling the blood of the sacrifice before the mercy-seat. *But Christ being come, an High Priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood, he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. He is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us.* — There, we are told, *he ever liveth to make intercession for his people.** — By his appearing in the human nature, while he is acting as Intercessor for mankind, an everlasting memorial is presented to the Almighty of the Redeemer's love to men. That sacrifice which was offered on Mount Calvary, still continues to ascend before the

* Heb. ix. 11, 12, 24. — vii. 25.

throne; and that blood which was shed on the cross, flows for ever in the sight of God.

CONCERNING the nature of this intercession, which our Saviour is represented as making in heaven, and his continuing to appear in the human nature for that purpose, I am aware that difficulties and objections may be raised by some. I readily admit, that the whole doctrine revealed to us in Scripture relating to the incarnation of Christ, the atonement made by his death, and the nature of his intercession for us in heaven, is of a mysterious kind. It is what we can comprehend in a very imperfect manner; and when we attempt too particularly to explain or discuss any of these doctrines, we are apt to *darken counsel by words without knowledge*. * — Let us not however imagine that the mysterious nature of those doctrines furnishes any just objection against the truth of the Christian revelation. It must be considered, that this revelation professes to give us such a discovery of the spiritual invisible world, and of the administration of the divine government, as was proper to be at present communicated to us. In such a revelation of things invisible and divine, and which stretch far beyond the reach of human knowledge or capacity, it was naturally to be expected that matters would occur which should be mysterious, and incomprehensible by us. Indeed, it would have been strange and incredible if it had been otherwise; if nothing had appeared on such subjects, but what was level to our apprehension. — In the present material system, in the midst of which we live, and where the objects that surround us are continually exposed to the examination of our senses, how many things occur that are mysterious and unaccountable? The philosopher, age after age, has continued his researches into matter. After all his researches will he, at this day, refuse to acknowledge, that, in material substances, qualities have been discovered, powers and properties have been found, which it is beyond his power to reconcile to the commonly received laws and operations of matter, and which he cannot bring within the compass of any established system and theory? Shall this philosopher then, who finds himself so often baffled in his inquiries, by meeting with wonders in matter which he cannot explain, presume to reject a religious system, merely because in treating of an invisible world, and the administration of government there carried on by the Father of Spirits, particulars occur which appear incomprehensible to him? — My brethren, let us be a little more humble and sober in our attempts to philosophise. Let us be thankful, that having received a revelation, which, upon rational grounds, stands well attested and confirmed, the mysterious doctrines which occur in it are all of them such as to be perfectly reconcileable with godliness and virtue; nay, such as have a direct tendency to promote the moral influence of virtue on the lives of men; and to bring powerful consolation to them under many troubles.

THIS is remarkably exemplified in that doctrine of which we are now treating, of the office performed by our Lord upon his ascension into heaven. A mediator and intercessor with God, is what most

* Job, xxxviii. 2.

nations and religions have anxiously sought to obtain. It has been at all times the favourite wish and hope of men; and from their earnestness to have this wish gratified, they contrived some form or other of mediation and intercession, on which they rested; some favourite hero, or saint, or tutelary subordinate god, through whose intervention they sought to obtain favour from the Supreme Governor of the universe. This is an idea which we find prevailing under most of the modes of Pagan worship. Men were generally sensible, that they were guilty of offences against the Deity; that their own services were insufficient to appease him; and that, therefore, they had no title to expect his favour, unless some mediator of high merit was to espouse their interest and plead their cause. — This relief, which the bewildered nations sought after in vain, is fully afforded us by the Gospel of Christ. A real mediator is there revealed, invested with such characters as give encouragement and satisfaction to every pious worshipper. The divine nature of which he is possessed, gives infinite merit and efficacy to every cause which he undertakes; and his possessing, at the same time, the human nature, gives us the justest ground to trust, that with compassion and tenderness he undertakes the cause of mankind.

The discovery, therefore, of Christ's acting as our Intercessor in heaven, is in the highest degree favourable to religion and virtue. It is so far from being a doctrine repugnant to the reason or to the natural ideas and notions of mankind, that it accords, as has been observed, in the general view of it, with what has ever been their wish and their hope; and the evangelical discovery of the true Mediator, while it banishes all the superstition and idolatry which heathen ignorance had attached to a mediatory worship, fulfils to Christians every purpose both of encouragement and consolation. It encourages the humble virtuous man, who might be apt to look up with distrust to the awful Majesty of Heaven. It brings consolation to the penitent returning sinner, from the belief that, unworthy as he is in himself, Christ the Saviour is worthy, by his powerful intercession, to procure his salvation. — What plan of religion could have been given more suited than this to the circumstances of man, in his present state of weakness and infirmity? What more animating to every sincere worshipper? — Let us study to do our best; and if our endeavours be faithful, and our hearts be upright, we have an advocate with the Father in heaven, on whose intercession we can rely; One who is able to save to the uttermost all who come unto God through him. *We have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.**

In the last place, Our Saviour ascended into heaven in order to exercise there the office of our King, as well as of our High Priest and Intercessor. His ascension was a solemn investiture in that royal authority with which he was to act as *Head of the Church*, till the end of time. All power in heaven and earth was committed to

* Heb. vii. 25. — iv. 15, 16.

him. In token of his being the Sovereign of both worlds, in triumph he rose from his earthly grave, and in triumph ascended into heaven. *Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ.*—I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion. I will give him the heathen for his inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for his possession.†*

This view of our Lord's ascension and exaltation obviously commands, from all Christians, the most profound reverence and submission. No longer let the humble appearance he made on earth vilify him to our apprehension. Never let the consideration of his grace and goodness as our Intercessor in heaven be separated from the thoughts of that awful majesty with which his ascension clothes him. With impunity none can offend him. If all the heavenly hosts adore him, if the whole universe obey him, what must be the fate of those, who, being of all creatures the most highly indebted to his goodness, revolt against his government, and refuse obedience to his laws?

But while with awe and reverence the ascension and regal character of our Saviour is fitted to inspire us, it communicates also the highest satisfaction and comfort to our hearts. *Let the children of Zion be joyful in their king.‡* They have a Sovereign to whose protection they can, with firm trust, commit all their interests in life and death. There is no temptation, under which his grace cannot be sufficient for them; no distress, from which it is not in his power to deliver them; no darkness, but he can enlighten by a ray sent down from his eternal throne. *Lo! I am with you always, even to the end of the world.§* From that eminence of celestial glory in which he resides, he beholds and remarks whatever is carried on throughout all his dominions. No secret conspiracy can escape his view; no fraud of wicked men or evil spirits can baffle his designs. *The heathen may rage, and the people imagine a vain thing. Kings of the earth may set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and his anointed. But he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision.* As his watchful eye is ever open to observe, so his almighty arm is ever extended to guard, his church and people. — The same characters of wisdom and power, of justice and mercy, which we ascribe to the Providence and dominion of God the Father, belong, in their fullest extent, to the kingdom and government of Christ the Son of God. This peculiar satisfaction his government affords us, that, in the midst of sovereign authority, we know that he still retains the same mild and compassionate spirit which he showed as our High Priest. The meanest of his subjects is not overlooked by him. The inhabitant of the most obscure cottage, equally as the possessor of the most splendid palace, dwells under his protection. He listens to the prayer of the poor, and despises not the services they yield him. *The widow's mite* is in his sight an acceptable offering; and even a *cup of cold water given to a disciple in his name* passes not without its reward. — Hence the

* Acts, ii. 36.

† Psalm cxlix. 2.

‡ Psalm ii. 6. 8.

§ Matt. xxviii. 20.

characters of his regal administration cannot be better described than in the beautiful language of the prophetic Psalmist: *He shall judge the people with righteousness, and the poor with judgment. The righteous shall flourish in his days. He shall save the children of the needy, and break in pieces the oppressor. He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper. His name shall endure for ever. It shall be continued as long as the sun. Men shall be blessed in him; and all nations shall call him blessed.**

WE have now under several views considered the ascension of Christ, and the important purposes which were answered by it. In going along, I have pointed out some of the chief effects which ought to be produced on us by this object of our faith. Much more might be said on this subject, did the bounds of a Discourse permit it. One improvement of the subject which the sacred writers often point out, must not be forgotten. *If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affections on things above, and not on things on the earth.†* A certain conformity with Christ, their great leader, in all the circumstances of his history, is in Scripture exacted from Christians. As they must *die with him to sin*, they must *rise with him unto newness of life*; and with him ascend in heart to heaven, and dwell in their affections where he is. The elevated hopes which Christ, by his resurrection and ascension, has set before us, ought to inspire Christians with suitable elevation of sentiment above this present world.—*As Christ is in you the hope of glory, let every one who hath this hope in him, purify himself as Christ is pure.‡* Let not the corrupt pleasures of this world debase you. Let not its terrors deject you. But in your whole conduct, let that dignity and equanimity appear, which belongs to those who have such high connexions. Christ, as your *forerunner*, hath entered into the highest heavens; Him, it is your part to follow, in the paths of piety and virtue. In those paths proceed with perseverance and constancy, animated by those words of your departing Redeemer, which ought ever to dwell in your remembrance: *Go to my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; to my God, and your God. In my Father's house are many mansions. I go to prepare a place for you. I will come again and receive you to myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.§*

SERMON LXXXVI.

ON A PEACEABLE DISPOSITION.

ROM. xii. 18.

If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

IT cannot but occur to every one who has read the New Testament, even in a cursory manner, that there is nothing more warmly and

* Psalm lxxii. † Coloss. iii. 1, 2. ‡ 1 John, iii. 3. § John, xx. 17. — xiv. 2, 3.

more frequently inculcated in it, than peace and love, union and good understanding among men. Were a person to form to himself an idea of the state of the Christian world, merely from reading our sacred books, and thence inferring how they would live who believed those books to be divine, he would draw, in his fancy, the fairest picture of a happy society: he would expect to meet with nothing but concord, harmony, and order; and to find the voice of clamour and contention for ever silent. But were such a person, fond to be himself a witness and a partaker, of such a blissful state, to come amongst us from afar, how miserably, alas! would he be disappointed, when in the actual conduct of Christians he discovered so little correspondence with the mild and peaceful genius of their professed religion; when he saw the fierce spirit of contention often raging unrestrained in public; and in private, the intercourse of men embittered, and society, disordered and convulsed with quarrels about trifles? Too justly might he carry away with him this opprobrious report, that surely those Christians have no belief in that religion they profess to hold sacred, seeing their practice so openly contradicts it.

In order to prevent, as much as we can, this reproach from attaching to us, let us now set ourselves to consider seriously the importance and the advantages of *living peaceably with all men*. — This duty may be thought by some to possess a low rank among the Christian virtues, and the phrase a *peaceable man*, to express no more than a very inferior character. I admit that gentleness, candour, sensibility, and friendship*, express a higher degree of refinement and improvement in the disposition; and that a good Christian ought to be distinguished by active benevolence, and zeal for remedying the miseries and promoting the felicity of others. But let it be remembered, that the love of peace is the foundation of all those virtues. It is the first article in the great Christian doctrine of charity; and its obligation is strict, in proportion as its importance is obvious. *Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.*† — I shall first show what is included in the precept of *living peaceably with all men*; and next, what arguments recommend our obedience to this precept.

I. THIS precept implies, in the first place, A sacred regard to the rules of justice, in rendering to every man what is his due. Without this first principle, there can be no friendly commerce among mankind. Justice is the basis on which all society rests. Throw down its obligation, and at that instant you banish peace from the earth; you let rapine loose, and involve all the tribes of men in perpetual hostility and war. To live peaceably, therefore, requires, as its first condition, that we content ourselves with what is our own, and never seek to encroach on the just rights of our neighbour; that, in our dealings, we take no unfair advantage; but conscientiously adhere to the great rule of doing to others, according as we wish they should do to us. It supposes that we never knowingly abet a wrong cause, nor espouse an unjust side, but always give our countenance to what is fair and equal. We are never to disturb any man in the enjoyment

* Vide Discourses on these virtues in the preceding Sermons. † Matt. v. 9.

of his lawful pleasure; nor to hinder him from advancing his lawful profit. But under a sense of our natural equality, and of that mutual relation which connects us together as men, we are to carry on our private interest in consistency with what is requisite for general order and good. *Render tribute to whom tribute is due; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour. Covet not what is thy brother's. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another.*

In the second place, The duty of living peaceably, not only prohibits all acts of open injustice, but requires us carefully to avoid giving unnecessary provocation or offence to others. When we consider from what small beginnings discord often arises, and to what astonishing heights from such beginnings it will grow, we will see much cause to watch with care over our words and actions, in our intercourse with the world. It ought to be an object of attention so to behave, as never needlessly to exasperate the passions of others. In particular, we are to guard against all improper liberties of speech, and contumelious reflections on persons and characters. — The man of peace is mild in his demeanour, and inoffensive in his discourse. He appears to despise no man. He is not fond of contradicting and opposing, and is always averse to censure and to blame. He never erects himself into the character of a dictator in society. He never officiously seeks to intermeddle in the affairs of others, nor to pry into their secrets; and avoids every occasion of disturbing the goodwill which men appear to bear to one another. — Opposite to this, stands the character of the man of unpeaceable and quarrelsome spirit; who, himself easily provoked by every trifle, is continually offending and provoking others by the harshness of his behaviour. He is loud in his censures, positive in his opinions, and impatient of all contradiction. He is a *busy body in other men's matters*; descants on their characters, inquires into their conduct, and, on the authority of his own suspicions, assigns what motives he pleases to their actions. Into the violence of party-spirit, he never fails to enter deeply; and confidently ascribes the worst principles to all who differ from him in opinion. — Such persons are the pests of society, and the troublers of all good order in human life. *Let every man study to be quiet, says the Apostle, and to do his own business. — Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? To his own master he standeth or falleth.**

In the third place, The study of peace requires, that on some occasions we scruple not to give up our own opinion, or even to depart from our strict right, for the sake of peace. — At the same time, for preventing mistakes on this subject, it is proper to observe, that a tame submission to violence and wrongs is not required by religion. We are not to imagine, that the love of peace is only another name for cowardice; or that it suppresses every proper exertion of a manly spirit. The expressions employed in the Text, *if it be possible, as much as lieth in you*, plainly insinuate, that there are cases in which it may not be in our power to *live peaceably with all men*. Every man is allowed to feel what is due to himself and his own character, and is entitled to support properly his own rights. In many cases,

* 1 Thess. iv. 11. Rom. xiv. 4.

the welfare of society requires that the attacks of the violent be checked and resisted. — What belongs to a good and a wise man is, to look forward coolly to the effects that are likely to follow the rigorous prosecution of any private rights of his own. If these appear to be pregnant with mischiefs to the society with which he is connected, in a much greater proportion than any advantage they can bring to himself, it then becomes his duty rather quietly to suffer wrong, than to kindle the flames of lasting discord. But how many are there, who, having once begun a claim, espoused a side, or engaged in a controversy, are determined to pursue it to the last, let the consequences be what they will? False notions of honour are brought in to justify their passions. Pride will not allow them to yield, or to make the least concession, when the true point of honour would have led to generous acknowledgments and condescension. They never make the first advances to returning reconciliation and peace. They are haughty in their claims, and require great submission before they can be appeased. — The lover of peace, on the other hand, looks upon men and manners in a milder and softer light. He views them with a philosophic, or rather a Christian eye. Conscious that he himself has been often in the wrong; sensible that offence is frequently thought to be given, where no injury was intended; knowing that all men are liable to be misled by false reports into unjust suspicions of their neighbours; he can pass over many things without disturbance or emotion, which, in more combustible tempers, would kindle a flame. In all public matters in which he is engaged, he will not be pertinaciously adhesive to every measure which he has once proposed, as if his honour were necessarily engaged to carry it through. If he see the passions of men beginning to rise and swell, he will endeavour to allay the growing storm. He will give up his favourite schemes, he will yield to an opponent, rather than become the cause of violent embroilments; and, next to religion and a good conscience, the cause of peace and union will be to him most sacred and dear.

In the fourth place, Our study of peace, in order to be effectual, must be of an extensive nature. It must not be limited to those with whom by interest, by good opinion, or by equality of station, we are connected. *Live peaceably with all men*, says the Apostle. No man is to be contemned because he is mean, or to be treated with incivility because he is one in whom we have no concern. Even to those whom we account bad men, the obligation of living at peace extends. This is not inconsistent with that just indignation which we ought to bear against their crimes. Without entering into any close connexion with them, without admitting them to be our friends and companions, it is certainly possible to live amongst them in a peaceable manner. Human society is at present composed of a confused mixture of good and evil men; and from our imperfect knowledge of characters, it is often not easy to distinguish the one class of men from the other. We are commonly prejudiced in favour of those who concur with us in our modes of thinking; and are prone to look with an evil eye on those who differ from us in subjects of importance. But if all the supposed blemishes of those with whom

we differ in opinion; if the heretical doctrines which we ascribe to them, or the bad principles with which we charge them, were sufficient to justify the breach of peace, very little harmonious correspondence would remain among men. Appearances of religious zeal have been too often employed to cover the pride and ill-nature of turbulent persons. — The man of peace will bear with many whose opinions or practices he dislikes, without an open and violent rupture. He will consider it as his duty to gain upon them by mildness, and to reclaim them as far as he can from what is evil, by calm persuasion, rather than to attempt reforming them by acrimony and censure. — Neither indeed is it every man's office to set up for a reformer of the world. Every man, it is true, is bound to promote reformation by his personal example. But if he assume a superiority to which he has no title; and, with rude and indiscreet zeal, administer reproofs, and thrust himself forward into the concerns of others, he is likely to do much more hurt than good; to break the peace of the world, without doing service to the cause of true religion.

If it thus appears to be our duty to extend our study of peace throughout the wide sphere of all who are around us, it will naturally occur that there is a certain narrower sphere within which this study ought to be particularly cultivated; towards all those, I mean, with whom Nature or Providence has joined us in close union, whether by bonds of friendship, kindred, and relation, or by the nearer ties of domestic and family connexion. There, it most highly concerns every one to put in practice all the parts of that peaceable and amicable behaviour which I before have described; to guard against every occasion of provocation and offence; to overlook accidental starts of ill-humour; to put the most favourable interpretation on words and actions. The closer that men are brought together, they must unavoidably rub, at times, the more on one another. The most delicate attentions are requisite, of course, for preventing tempers being ruffled, and peace being broken, by those slight failings from which none are exempt. It is within the circle of domestic life, that the character of the man of peace will be particularly distinguished as amiable; and where he will most comfortably enjoy the fruits of his happy disposition.

HAVING now explained the precept in the Text, and shown what is included in living peaceably with all men, I come next to suggest some considerations for recommending this peaceable disposition.

LET us recollect, in the first place, as a bond of union and peace, The natural relation which subsists among us all as men, sprung from one Father, connected by one common nature, and by fellowship in the same common necessities and wants; connected as Christians closer still, by acknowledgment of the same Lord, and participation of the same divine hopes. Ought lesser differences altogether to divide and estrange those from one another, whom such ancient and sacred bonds unite? In all other cases, the remembrance of kindred, or brotherhood, of a common parent, and common family, tends to soften the harsher feelings, and often has influence, when feuds arise, to melt and overcome the heart. Why should not a remembrance

of the same kind have some effect with respect to the great brotherhood of mankind? — How unnatural and shocking is it, on occasion of some angry expression or trifling affront, to which sudden passion or mistaken report has given rise, a man shall deliberately go forth with the barbarous purpose of plunging his sword into his brother's breast? What a reproach to reason and humanity, that a ridiculous idea of honour, derived from times of Gothic grossness and ignorance, should stain the annals of modern life with so many tragical scenes of horror!

Let the sentiment of our natural connexion with each other as men, dispose us the more to peace, from a reflection on our common failings, and the mutual allowances which those failings oblige us to make. A sense of equity should here arise, to prompt forbearance and forgiveness. Were there any man who could say that he had never, in the course of his life, suffered himself to be transported by passion, or given just ground of offence to any one, such a man might have some plea for impatience, when he received from others unreasonable treatment. But if no such perfectly unexceptionable characters are to be found, how unjust is it not to give to others those allowances which we, in our turn, must claim from them? — To our own failings, we are always blind. Our pride and self-conceit render us quarrelsome and contentious, by nourishing a weak and childish sensibility to every fancied point of our own honour or interest, while they shut up all regard to the honour or interest of our brethren. From the high region of imaginary self-estimation, let us descend to our own just and proper level. Let us calmly reflect on the place we hold in society, and on the justice that is due to others. From such reflections we will learn to be more humble in our claims, and more moderate in our pretensions; and many of the causes of animosity and contention will die away.

LET us consider, in the next place, How trifling and inconsiderable, for the most part, the causes are of contention and discord among mankind, and how much they deserve to be overlooked by the wise and the good. When we view the eagerness with which contests are agitated in society, and look to the bitterness and wrath they so oft occasion, one would think that all were at stake, and that there could be no life, no happiness on earth, unless to him who was victorious in the contest. And yet, in how few instances has there been any just ground for this mighty ferment of spirits? — You have been slighted, perhaps, by a superiour; you have been ungratefully treated by a friend; a rival has over-reached you by fraud, or overcome you by more powerful interest. Amidst the bustle of life, amidst the interfering and crossing of various pursuits and interests, are not such incidents to be expected by every one? Ought you not to have been prepared for encountering them without passion or violence, as evils belonging to the common lot of humanity? As light bodies are shaken and torn by every breath of wind, while those that are solid resist the blast; so it is only the little and mean mind that loses possession of itself on every trifling provocation; while a great and firm spirit keeps its place, and rests on a basis of its own, unshaken by

the common disturbances of life. — Of what small moment to your real happiness are many of those injuries which draw forth your resentment? They may affect in some degree your worldly interests; but can they affect your true honour as a man? Can they deprive you of peace of conscience, of the satisfaction of having acted a right part, of the pleasing sense of being esteemed by men, and the hope of being rewarded by God, for your generosity and forgiveness? — In the moments of eager contention all is magnified and distorted in its appearance. A false light is thrown on every object. Nothing appears to be what it really is. But let the hour of violence pass over; let the course of time bring forward recollection and calmness, and you will wonder at your former violence. Objects which once were so formidable, will then have disappeared. A new scene has taken place; and the grounds of former contention will seem as dreams of the night, which have passed away. — Act then now the part of a man, by anticipating that period of coolness, which time will certainly bring. You will then cease to break the peace of society with your angry contentions. You will show that magnanimity which belongs to those who depend not for their happiness merely on the occurrences of the world. *He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city.**

LET us now consider the different consequences of a contentious spirit, and of a peaceable disposition, with respect to our happiness and enjoyment. The foundation of happiness must certainly be laid within our breasts. If one be pained and uneasy there, external circumstances, how flourishing soever, avail him nothing: And what feelings are more uneasy and painful than the workings of sour and angry passions? Great and manifold as the natural and unavoidable distresses of our present state are, they are small in comparison of the evils which men bring upon themselves, and bring upon one another, by variance and discord. I speak not now of public calamities, of faction and ambition raging through the world, and hostile armies laying waste the earth with desolation and bloodshed. Confining our views solely to private life, how miserably is all its comfort and order destroyed by those jealousies, feuds, and animosities, that so often break the peace of families, tear asunder the bonds of friendship, and poison all that social intercourse which men were formed to entertain with one another? From a small chink, which some rude hand has opened, the bitter waters of strife easily flow. But of this we may be assured; that a full portion of their bitterness shall be tasted by him who has let them forth. Never was any man active in disquieting others, who did not at the same time disquiet himself. While the tempest which he has raised may be bursting on his neighbour, he will be obliged to feel the hurricane raging in his own breast; and from his restlessness, impatience, and eagerness, joined with anxious trepidations and fears, will often suffer more than all that he can inflict on his adversary.

From such painful sensations the man of peace is free. A mild,

* Prov. xvi. 32.

unruffled, self-possessing mind is a blessing more important to real felicity, than all that can be gained by the triumphant issue of some violent contest: Never was a truer axiom pronounced by any mouth, than what was uttered by the wise man of old; *Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, than a stalled ox and hatred therewith.** With a scanty provision of the good things of this world, a wise man may be contented and happy; but without peace, all the luxuries of the rich lose their relish. — While among the sons of strife all is tempestuous and loud; the smooth stream, the serene atmosphere, the mild zephyr, are the proper emblems of a gentle temper, and a peaceable life. Nor is this merely a poetical allusion. The ordinary language of discourse, where the terms are so often employed of a storm of passion, a calm mind, a rough or a fiery temper, plainly show that all men are sensible of some analogy between a peaceable disposition, and those scenes of external nature that are universally agreeable and pleasant. The condition of those who are living in unity with their brethren, is likened by the psalmist David to the dew of Hermon; *the dew that descended on the mountains of Zion, where the Lord commanded the blessing, even life for evermore.†*

While the man of this disposition is happy within himself, let it not be forgotten, that he is at the same time gaining on all around him. From the quarrelsome and rude, all men naturally recoil; and, except when necessity obliges them, avoid their intercourse. But the lover of peace conciliates general good-will; and is both respected and beloved. Though no absolute security can be devised against the malice and injustice of the world, yet, for the most part, it will be found, that there is no more effectual guard against violence, no surer road to a safe enjoyment of life, than an established character for benignity and regard to peace. The man of this character, if unjustly attacked, will have many to defend him, and take his part. In his prosperity he will be unenvied, and his misfortunes will be alleviated by general sympathy.

Let us consider, in the last place, How strongly the precept in the Text is enforced by the most sacred religious obligations. You all know what a high place charity, under all its forms of meekness, forbearance, and forgiveness, possesses in the Christian system. To bring authorities in support of this, were to recite a great part of the New Testament before you. The God whom we worship, is known by the title of *the God of Peace*. That evil spirit who is opposite to him, is described with all the characters which express malignity; *the enemy, the accuser, the liar, the destroyer*. When Christ came into the world as our Saviour, he is styled the Prince of Peace. The blessings which were proclaimed at his birth were, *peace upon earth, and good-will towards men*. The whole of his life was one continued exemplification of all the virtues that characterise the meek, the peaceable, and forgiving spirit. Never was any one's temper tried by so many and so great provocations; never did any one retain, after these provocations, such a calm and unruffled tenour of mind; so much that the Apostle Paul, on an occasion of earnest

* Prov. xv. 17.

† Psalm cxxxiii. 3.

intreaty to the Corinthians; *beseeches them by the meekness and gentleness of Christ* *, as the most noted and well-known parts of his character. What can be said higher of any virtue, than that it is the quality, under the denomination of which, the Son of God chose to be known when he dwelt on earth? Let us add, that it is also the distinguishing character of God's own Spirit. The Holy Ghost is called the *Spirit of Peace*. *Meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering*, are expressly denominated *his fruits*; and, on a certain memorable occasion, his appearance was marked with signals that express the mild and quiet spirit as distinguished from violence. When Elijah the great prophet was called to go forth and stand before the Lord, *behold, a great and strong wind rent the mountains, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. After that, there came forth a still small voice. When Elijah heard it*, he knew the symbol of God's spirit; *he wrapped his face in his mantle, and worshipped*. †

AFTER so many testimonies given by the sacred writings to the high importance of a meek and peaceable spirit, what shall we think of those, who, in their system of religion, make slight account of this virtue; who are ready to quarrel with others on the most trifling occasions; who are continually disquieting their families by peevishness and ill-humour; and, by malignant reports, raising dissension among friends and neighbours? Can any claims to sound belief, or any supposed attainments of grace, supply the defect of so cardinal a virtue as charity and love?—Let such persons particularly bethink themselves how little the spirit which they possess fits them for the kingdom of heaven, or rather how far it removes them from the just hope of ever entering into it. Hell is the proper region of enmity and strife. There dwell unpeaceable and fiery spirits, in the midst of mutual hatred, wrath, and tumult. But the kingdom of heaven is the kingdom of peace. There, *charity never faileth*. There, reigneth the God of Love; and, in his presence, all the blessed inhabitants are of one heart and one soul. No string can ever be heard to jar in that celestial harmony; and therefore the contentious and violent are, both by their own nature and by God's decree, for ever excluded from the heavenly society. — As the best preparation for those blessed mansions, let us ever keep in view that direction given by an Apostle; *Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*. ‡ To the cultivation of amity and peace in all our social intercourse, let us join *holiness*; that is, piety and active virtue: and thus we shall pass our days comfortably and honourably on earth, and, at the conclusion of our days, be admitted to dwell among saints and angels, and to see the Lord.

* 2 Cor. x. 1.

† 1 Kings, xix. 11—13.

‡ Heb. xii. 14.

SERMON LXXXVII.

ON RELIGIOUS JOY, AS GIVING STRENGTH AND SUPPORT TO VIRTUE.

NEHEMIAH, viii. 10.

— *The joy of the Lord is your strength.*

NEHEMIAH, the Governour of Jerusalem, having assembled the people of Israel immediately after their return from the captivity of Babylon, made the book of the law be brought forth and read before them. On hearing the words of the book of the law, we are informed that *all the people wept*; humbled and cast down by the sense of their present weak and forlorn condition, compared with the flourishing state of their ancestors. Nehemiah sought to raise their spirits from this dejection; and exhorts them to prepare themselves for serving the God of their fathers with a cheerful mind; *for*, says he, *the joy of the Lord is your strength.*

Abstracted from the occasion on which the words were spoken, they contain an important truth, which I now purpose to illustrate; that to the nature of true religion there belongs an inward joy, which animates, strengthens, and supports virtue. The illustration of this position will require that I should show, in the first place, that in the practice of religious duties there is found an inward joy, here styled *the joy of the Lord*; and, in the next place, that this joy is justly denominated the *strength* of the righteous.

I. JOY is a word of various signification. By men of the world, it is often used to express those flashes of mirth which arise from irregular indulgences of social pleasure; and of which it is said by the wise man, that in such *laughter the heart is sorrowful, and the end of that mirth is heaviness.** It will be easily understood that the *joy* here mentioned partakes of nothing a-kin to this; but signifies a tranquil and placid joy, an inward complacency and satisfaction, accompanying the practice of virtue, and the discharge of every part of our duty. A joy of this kind is what we assert to belong to every part of religion; to characterise religion wherever it is genuine, and to be essential to its nature.—In order to ascertain this, let us consider the disposition of a good man with respect to God; with respect to his neighbours; and with respect to the government of his own mind.

WHEN we consider in what manner religion requires that a good man should stand affected towards God, it will presently appear, that rational enlightened piety opens such views of him as must communicate joy. It presents him, not as an awful unknown Sovereign, but as the Father of the universe, the Lover and Protector of righteousness, under whose government all the interests of the virtuous are safe. With delight the good man traces the Creator throughout all his works, and beholds them every-where reflecting some image of his supreme perfection. In the morning dawn, the noontide glory,

* Prov. xiv. 13.

and the evening shade; in the fields, the mountains, and the flood, where worldly men, behold nothing but a dead, uninteresting scene; every object is enlivened and animated to him by the presence of God. Amidst that Divine presence he dwells with reverence, but without terror. Conscious of the uprightness of his own intentions, and of the fidelity of his heart to God, he considers himself, by night and by day, as under the protection of an invisible guardian. He *lifts up his eyes to the hills from whence cometh his aid*; and commits himself without distrust to the *Keeper of Israel, who never slumbers nor sleeps*. He listens to the gracious promises of his word. With comfort he receives the declarations of his mercy to mankind, through a great Redeemer; in virtue of whose atonement provision is made for pardon to human infirmities, and for our reception in the end into a happier world. All the various devotional exercises of faith and trust in God, all the cordial effusions of love and gratitude to this Supreme Benefactor in the acts of prayer and praise, afford scope to those emotions of the heart, which are of the most pleasing kind; and which diffuse a gentle and softening tenderness over the affections. In a word, a truly pious man, who has always before him an object so sublime and interesting as this great Father of the universe, on whom his thoughts can dwell with satisfaction, may be truly said to partake highly in the *joy of the Lord*.

But it may here be objected, Are there no mortifications and griefs that particularly belong to piety? What shall we say to the tear of repentance, and to that humiliation of confession and remorse, which may, at times, be incumbent on the most pious, in this state of human infirmity?—To this I reply, first, that although there may be seasons of grief and dejection in a course of piety, yet this is not inconsistent with the joy of the Lord, being, on the whole, the predominant character of a good man's state; as it is impossible that, during this life, perpetual brightness can remain in any quarter, without some dark cloud. But I must observe next, that even the penitential sorrows and relentings of a pious heart are not without their own satisfactions. A certain degree of pleasure is mingled with the tears which the returning offender sheds, in the hours of compunction; the ingenuous contrition that he feels relieves his heart, at the same time that it gives it pain. If we attend to the workings of human nature on other occasions, we shall find that it is no unusual thing for a secret mysterious pleasure to be mixed with painful feelings. This we all know to be the case in those exercises of pity and commiseration to which we are led by sympathy with the afflicted. We grieve and are pained for their distress; yet we choose to indulge that grief; satisfaction is felt in the indulgence; and we are unwillingly separated from the object which has occasioned this painful, but tender sympathy. A mixture, somewhat similar, of pleasure and pain, takes place in the sentiments of penitential sorrow, which good men sometimes feel. In the midst of their distress, they are soothed by an internal consciousness, that they are affected as it becomes them to be; that they feel as they ought to feel; and they are gradually relieved by the hope rising in their breast, of finding mercy

and acceptance with their Creator and Redeemer. Where the mind is properly instructed in religion, it will not long be left in a state of overwhelming dejection, but will return to tranquillity, and repossess again the *joy of the Lord*.

When we consider, next, the disposition of a good man towards his fellow-creatures, we shall find here the joy of the Lord exerting its influence fully. That mild and benevolent temper to which he is formed by virtue and piety; a temper that is free from envious and malignant passions, and that can look with the eye of candour and humanity on surrounding characters, is a constant spring of cheerfulness and serenity. Indeed, if there be joy at all in human life, it is, perhaps, in this state of the mind that it is most sensibly felt, and felt with the least check or alloy. It is truly said, *to the wicked there is no peace*. In proportion as any one of the bad passions predominates in the breast, it never fails, in the same proportion, to corrode the heart, and to shed over all the comforts of life a poisonous and baneful influence. Whereas all those exercises of friendship, compassion, and generosity, which are essential to the disposition of a virtuous man, are to him lively enjoyments of pleasure in themselves, and increase the satisfaction which he tastes in all the other innocent pleasures of life. He knows that he enjoys them along with the goodwill and the blessings of all to whom he has studied to do good. When he can cheer the dejected or gladden the sorrowful, he is cheered and gladdened himself. If his circumstances allow him not to do all the good he wishes to have done, yet in the consciousness of good intentions there is always an inward satisfaction; and in those lesser offices of kindness and humanity which are within the sphere of every man to perform, he enjoys innumerable occasions of being pleased and happy.

With respect to that part of religion which consists in the government of a man's own mind, of his passions and desires, it may be thought that much joy is not to be expected. For there religion appears to lay on a severe and restraining hand. Strict temperance and self-denial are often requisite; and much is on some occasions abridged, of what is apt to be reckoned the full and free enjoyment of life. Yet, here also it will be found, that the *joy of the Lord* takes place. To a person just reclaimed from the excesses of sensual indulgence, the restraints imposed by virtue will, at first, appear uncouth and mortifying. But let him begin to be accustomed to a regular life, and his taste will soon be rectified, and his feelings will change. In purity, temperance, and self-government, there is found a satisfaction in the mind, similar to what results from the enjoyment of perfect health in the body. A man is then conscious that all is sound within. There is nothing that gnaws his spirit; that makes him ashamed of himself; or discomposes his calm and orderly enjoyment of life. His conscience testifies that he is acting honourably. He enjoys the satisfaction of being master of himself. He feels that no man can accuse him of degrading his character by base pleasures or low pursuits; and knows that he will be honoured and esteemed by those whose honour and esteem he would most desire;

all which are sensations most pleasing and gratifying to every human heart.

FROM this slight sketch it plainly appears, that there is an inward satisfaction, justly termed *the joy of the Lord*, which runs through all the parts of religion. This is a very different view of religion from what is entertained by those who consider it as a state of perpetual penance; to which its votaries unwillingly submit, merely from the dread of punishment in hell; and who bargain for the rewards of another world, by a renunciation of all that is agreeable or comfortable to man in this world. Such conceptions of religion are contradicted by the experience of every truly virtuous man, and are directly opposite to the views of religion given us in the word of God; wherein its ways are termed *ways of pleasantness and paths of peace*; and where we are assured that, *in the keeping of God's commands*, there is an immediate *great reward*.

But what it concerns us at present to remark is, that some experience of this *joy of the Lord* which I have described, enters as an essential part into the character of every good man. In proportion to the degree of his goodness, to his improvement and progress in virtue, will be the degree of his participation in the pleasure and joy of religion. But wherever such pleasure is entirely unknown; wherever there is no satisfaction and delight in the discharge of virtuous duties, there we are obliged to conclude, that religion does not subsist in its genuine state. It is either a sanctimonious show merely; a forced appearance of piety and virtue, tinctured, perhaps, with some deep shades of superstition; or, at best, it is religion in its most weak and imperfect state. It is deficient in the regeneration of the heart. The man himself is in a divided and hovering state, between two opposite principles of action; partly affecting to be obedient to God's commands, and partly a slave to the world. The truth and importance of this observation will more fully appear, when we proceed to what was proposed for the

III^d Head of Discourse, — to show in what respects the joy of the Lord is justly said to be *the strength of the righteous*.

IN the first place, It is the animating principle of virtue; it supports its influence, and assists it in becoming both persevering and progressive. Experience may teach us that few undertakings are lasting or successful, which are accompanied with no pleasure. If a man's religion be considered merely as a task prescribed to him, which he feels burdensome and oppressive, it is not likely that he will long constrain himself to act against the bent of inclination. It is not until he feels somewhat within him which attracts him to his duty, that he can be expected to be constant and zealous in the performance of it. Was it ever found that a person advanced far in any art or study, whether of the liberal or mechanical kind, in which he had no pleasure, to which he had no heart, but which, from motives merely of interest or fear, he was compelled to undertake? Is it then to be thought that religion will prove the only exception to what holds so generally, and will continue an actuating principle of conduct, whether we love it for its own sake, or not? It is true,

that a sense of duty may sometimes exercise its authority, though there be no sensations of pleasure to assist it. Belief of those religious principles in which we were educated, and dread of future punishment, will, in cases where no strong temptation assails us, restrain from the commission of atrocious crimes, and produce some decent regularity of external conduct. But on occasions when inclination or interest prompt to some transgression of virtue, which safety or secrecy encourages, and which the example of the world seems to countenance; when the present advantage or pleasure appears to be all on one side, and no satisfaction arises to counterbalance it on the other; is it to be thought that conscience will then stand its ground, with one who never was attached to virtue on its own account, and never experienced any joy in following its dictates? — But these are the occasions when the *joy of the Lord* proves the *strength of the righteous man*. Accustomed to take pleasure in doing his duty; accustomed to look up to God with delight and complacency, and to feel himself happy in all the offices of kindness and humanity to men around him; accustomed to rejoice in a clear conscience, in a pure heart, and the hope of heavenly bliss; he cannot think of parting with such satisfactions for the sake of any worldly bribe. There is something within his heart, that pleads for religion and virtue. He has seen their beauty; he has tasted their sweetness; and having such pleasures within himself, to oppose to all the pleasures of sin, he is enabled to maintain his integrity inviolate; or if in any degree he has deviated from it, speedy remorse is awakened, and he cannot be satisfied with himself till he returns back to the right path. Thus, through the *joy of the Lord*, religion becomes in him *the spirit of love, and power, and of a sound mind*. * It is the *peace of God, which passeth understanding, keeping his mind and heart*. † It is the *path of the just, which is as the light, shining more and more unto the perfect day*.

IN the next place, The joy of the Lord is the *strength of the righteous*, as it is their great support under the discouragements and trials of life. In the days of their ease and prosperity, it guards them, as has been shown, against the temptations of vice; and in the general tenour of conduct, attaches them to the side of virtue: and when the evil days come, wherein they shall have no pleasure from the world, it supplies them with pleasures of another kind, to preserve them from improper despondency, or from entering into evil discourses for the sake of relief. — A good man's friends may forsake him; or may die, and leave him to mourn. His fortune may fail, or his health decay. * Calumny and reproach may unjustly attack his character. In circumstances of this kind, where worldly men become peevish, dispirited, and fretful, he who is acquainted with the pleasures of religion and virtue, can possess himself calm and undisturbed. He has resources within unknown to the world, whence light arises to him in darkness. From the gloom or turbulence of external evils, he can retreat to the enjoyment of his own mind. In the exercises of devotion, his heart is elevated, and the cares of the

world are forgotten. In his regular discharge of all the special duties of life, he finds cheerfulness and pleasure. Hence his temper is not soured. He accuses neither God nor man for the unavoidable misfortunes of life. He submits with patience to the common lot; looking forward with good hope to better days; retaining always honourable thoughts of God's providence, and sentiments of candour towards men. — In this manner, his experience of the joy of the Lord becomes *his strength*; as infusing into his mind a principle of firmness and stability, and enabling him, in every situation of fortune, to continue the same.

FROM the view which we have now taken of the subject, it must clearly appear, that to every one who wishes to possess the spirit, and to support the character of genuine goodness and virtue, it is an object most desirable and important, to acquire a prevailing relish for the pleasures of religion. As this is a most important object, so also it is an attainable one by every man whose intentions are sincerely upright. For let it be remembered, that the *joy of the Lord*, which I have described as *the strength of the righteous*, is not to be understood as a privilege belonging only to saints of the highest order, who can assuredly trust to their being the chosen of God. It is not to be understood of high raptures, and transports of religious fervour. It is not even confined to the sole pleasures or intercourse with God in devotion; though assuredly these constitute one great part of the *joy of the Lord*, and are auxiliary to its exercises on every other occasion. The *joy of the Lord* is to be understood of that joy, which accompanies the whole of religious and virtuous practice; that satisfaction which a good man feels in the discharge of his duty, which accompanies the performance of all the offices which belong to the station of life in which he is placed; whether these be of a public nature or private; social and domestic, or relating particularly to the exercises of religious worship and devotion.

To attain this spirit, of considering the discharge of our duty as our pleasure and happiness, is certainly not incompatible with our present state of infirmity. It is no more than what good men have often attained, and have testified of it; that *their delight was in the law of God*; that *his statutes were sweet to their taste*; that *they had taken them as an heritage for ever, for they were the rejoicing of their heart*. *I delight to do thy will, O my God; thy law is within my heart.** — According to the proficiency which men have made in virtue, will be the degree of satisfaction which they receive from the performance of it; but where no pleasures or satisfactions of this kind are known, men have much ground to distrust their pretensions to godliness or Christianity.

It is therefore of high importance, that all proper means be employed to form our internal taste to a proper relish for this joy of the Lord. For it is not to be dissembled, that much is against us in our endeavours to have our disposition formed for relishing virtuous pleasures. We breathe in this world a sort of vitiated air, very unfriendly to the health and soundness of all our moral feelings. From our

* Psalm cxix. 111. — xl. 8.

earliest youth we are bred up in admiration of the external advantages of fortune; and are accustomed to hear them extolled as the only real and substantial goods. We must therefore begin by studying to correct these false ideas, and persuading ourselves that there are other things besides riches, honours, and sensual pleasures, that are good for man; that there are joys of a spiritual and intellectual nature, which directly affect the mind and heart, and which confer a satisfaction both more refined and more lasting than any worldly circumstances can confer. In order to have a fair trial of the value and effect of those spiritual enjoyments, we must forbear polluting ourselves with gross and guilty pleasures; we must even refrain from indulging worldly pleasures that appear innocent, in a profuse and intemperate degree, lest they sensualise and debase our feelings. By preserving a wise and manly temperance in lower pleasures and pursuits, we will then allow those of a higher kind to occupy their proper place; and shall be in a situation fairly to compare the pure sensations of pleasure which arise from the consciousness of discharging our duty, with the transient and turbid gratifications of sin and the world. To such endeavours of our own, for rectifying and improving our taste of pleasure, let us join frequent and fervent prayer to God, that he may enlighten and reform our hearts; and by his spirit communicate that joy to our souls, which descends from him, and which he has annexed to every part of religion and virtue as the *strength of the righteous*.

SERMON LXXXVIII.

ON THE FOLLY OF THE WISDOM OF THE WORLD.

1 COR. iii. 19.

The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

THE judgment which we form of ourselves, often differs widely from that which is formed of us by God, whose judgment alone is always conformable to the truth. In our opinion of the abilities which we imagine ourselves to possess, there is always much self-flattery; and in the happiness which we expect to enjoy in this world, there is always much deceit. As there is a worldly happiness, which God perceives to be no other than concealed misery; as there is a worldly honour, which in his estimation is reproach; so, as the Text informs us, there is a *wisdom of this world* which is *foolishness with God*. Assuredly there is nothing in which it imports us more that our judgment should agree with the truth, than in what relates to wisdom. It is the qualification upon which every man is inclined to value himself, more than on any other. They who can with patience suffer imputations on other parts of their character, are ready to lose their temper, and to feel sore and hurt when they are attacked for defi-

ciency in prudence and judgment. Wisdom is justly considered as the guide of conduct. If any capital error shall take place respecting it; if one shall mistake that for wisdom which at bottom is mere folly; such a mistake will pervert the first principles of conduct, and be perpetually misleading a man through the whole of life. — As the Text plainly intimates that this mistake does often take place in the world, and as it materially concerns us all to be on our guard against so great a danger, I shall endeavour to show, first, what the nature and spirit of that *wisdom of the world* is, which is here condemned; and next, in what sense and on what account it is styled *foolishness with God*.

I. LET us consider the nature of that wisdom which is reprobated in the Text as foolishness with God. It is styled the *wisdom of this world*; that is, the wisdom which is most current, and most prized in this world; the wisdom which particularly distinguishes the character of those who are commonly known by the name of *men of the world*. Its first and most noted distinction is, that its pursuits are confined entirely to the temporal advantages of the world. Spiritual blessings, or moral improvements, the man of this spirit rejects as a sort of airy unsubstantial enjoyments, which he leaves to the speculative and the simple; attaching himself wholly to what he reckons the only solid goods, the possession of riches and influence, of reputation and power, together with all the conveniences and pleasures which opulent rank or station can procure.

In pursuit of these favourite ends, he is not in the least scrupulous as to his choice of means. If he prefer those which are the fairest, it is not because they are fair, but because they seem to him most likely to prove successful. He is sensible that it is for his interest to preserve decorums, and to stand well in the public opinion. Hence he is seldom an openly profligate man, or marked by any glaring enormities of conduct. In this respect, his character differs from that of those who are commonly called *men of pleasure*. Then he considers as a thoughtless, giddy herd, who are the victims of passion and momentary impulse. The thorough-bred man of the world is more steady and regular in his pursuits. He is, for the most part, composed in his manners, and decent in his vices. He will often find it expedient to be esteemed by the world as worthy and good. But to be thought good, answers his purpose much better than subjecting himself to become really such; and what he can conceal from the world, he conceives to be the same as if it had never been. — Let me here remark in passing, that the character which I am now describing, is one less likely to be reclaimed and reformed, than that of those whom I mentioned above as the men of pleasure. With them, vice breaks forth in occasional fits and starts; with the other, it grows up into a hardened and confirmed principle. In the midst of the gross irregularities of pleasure, circumstances often force remorse on the sinner's mind. Moments of compunction arise, which may be succeeded by conviction and reformation. But the cool and temperate plan of iniquity, on which the man of worldly wisdom proceeds, allows the voice of conscience to be longer silent. The alarm which it

gives, is not so loud and violent as to awaken him at once from his evil courses, and instantly to prepare him for a better mind.

The man of the world is always a man of selfish and contracted disposition. Friends, country, duty, honour, all disappear from his view, when his own interest is in question. He is of a hard heart; he chooses indeed to be so, lest at any time the unguarded effusions of kind affections should carry him beyond the line of worldly wisdom. The more thoroughly that the spirit of the world has taken possession of him, the circle of his affections becomes always the narrower. His family will perhaps find place, as connected with his own importance, and with his plans either of power or wealth; but all beyond that circle are excluded from any particular regard. It is his great principle never to embark seriously in any undertaking, from which he foresees no benefit likely to redound to himself. Public spirit he considers either as a mere chimera created by the simple, or a pretence employed by the artful for their own purpose. Judging of the rest of the world by what he feels within himself, he proceeds on the supposition that all men are carrying on interested designs of their own, and of course is ever on his guard against them. Hence, to the cordialities of friendship he is an entire stranger; too much wrapt up in himself, indeed, to be a friend to any one; and if his prudence restrain him from being an open and violent enemy, yet he is always an unforgiving one.

Candour, openness, and simplicity of manners, are ridiculed by the man of this description, as implying mere ignorance of the world. Art and address are the qualities on which he values himself. For the most part, he would choose to supplant a rival by intrigue, rather than to overcome him by fair opposition. Indeed, what men call policy and knowledge of the world, is commonly no other thing than dissimulation and insincerity. The world is a great school, where deceit in all its forms is one of the lessons that is first learned, and most eagerly caught by such as aspire to be proficient in worldly wisdom. A man of the world, in short, is one, who, upon any call of interest, flatters and deceives you; who can smile in your face, while he is contriving plans for your ruin; who, upon no occasion, thinks of what is right, or fit, or honourable; but only of what is expedient and useful to himself.

I HAVE dwelt the more fully on the delineation of this character, that each of us might learn whether there be any feature in it that applies to himself; as it is a character too frequently met with in the world, and not always so severely reprobated as it ought to be. Let me now ask, whether such a character as I have described be in any respect an amiable one? Is the man of the world, polished, and plausible, and courtly, as in his behaviour he may be, one whom you would choose for a companion and bosom-friend? Would you wish him for a son, a brother, or a husband? Would you reckon yourself safe in confiding your interests to him, or entrusting him with your secrets? Nay, let me ask, if he be one whom in your hearts you respect and honour? His shrewdness and abilities you may perhaps admire; stand in awe of him you may; and, for the sake

of advantage, may wish him to be on your side. But could you honour him as a parent, or venerate him as a magistrate; or would you wish to live under him as a sovereign? Of what real value then, let me ask, is that boasted wisdom of the world; which can neither conciliate love, nor produce trust, nor command inward respect? — At the same time, I admit that the man of the world may be a man of very considerable abilities. He may display talents of many different sorts. Besides art and sagacity, he may possess genius and learning; he may be distinguished for eloquence in supporting his own cause; he may have valour and courage to defend himself against his enemies. — But observe, I entreat you, a consequence that follows. You see in this instance, that the most distinguished human abilities, when they are separated from virtue and moral worth, lose their chief eminence and lustre, and are deprived of all valuable efficacy. They dwindle into despicable talents, which have no power to command the hearts, nor to ensure the respect and honour of mankind. Let it be carefully observed, and always remembered, that integrity, probity, and moral worth, are essentially requisite to give the stamp of real excellence to any powers or abilities which the human mind can possess. — Having now considered the nature and effect of worldly wisdom with respect to men, let us inquire,

II. How it stands with respect to God. It is said in the Text, to be *foolishness with God*. It is so in three respects: It is contemptible in God's sight; it is baffled in its attempts by God; or, when its attempts are successful, they are allowed to produce nothing but disappointment and vanity.

FIRST, It is contemptible in God's sight. Pleased and satisfied as the wise man of the world may be with himself, and honoured as he may fancy himself to be by the multitude, let him be mortified with reflecting that, in the eye of him who is the Supreme Judge of all worth, his character is mean and wretched. That which God declares himself to love and honour, is *truth in the inward parts*; the fair, sincere, and candid mind. He who *walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness*, is the person who shall *abide in his tabernacle, and dwell in his holy hill*. When our blessed Lord designed to mark one of his followers with peculiar distinction and honour, he said of him, *Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile**; a character so directly the reverse of worldly wisdom, that from this circumstance alone you may judge in what rank that wisdom stood with him.

But it is not only from the declarations of the Scripture, but from the whole course of Providence, that we learn the contempt in which God holds the wisdom of the world. Who were they on whom he conferred the highest marks of distinction which ever honoured mankind; whom he singled out to be the companions of Christ, the workers of miracles, the publishers of everlasting happiness to mankind? Were they the wise men of the world, the refined, and the political, who were employed as the instruments of God on this great occasion? No: he chose a few plain, simple, undesigning men, in

* John, i. 47.

order to make foolish the *wisdom of the world*, and by their means to overthrow the establishments of the artful, the learned, and the mighty. — To this day, God in the course of his Providence bestows those external advantages which the men of the world so earnestly pursue, with apparent disregard of worldly wisdom. He allows no fixed nor regular connexion to subsist between an artful, political conduct, and riches, reputation, or honours; he allows them not this mark of value; he does not always give the race to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor riches to men of understanding; but, on the contrary, scatters the advantages of fortune with a promiscuous hand; and often allows them to be attained by the vilest and lowest of men, who neither by worldly wisdom, nor any other talent whatever, had the smallest title to deserve them. — Judge then, ye wise men of this world, whether your characters and pursuits be not most contemptible in God's sight, when you behold those spiritual blessings which he esteems, withheld from you, and bestowed only on the good and the pious; and those worldly blessings which you covet, when at any time they are allowed to you, yet allowed only as a portion in common to you with the refuse of mankind, with many characters so infamous that you yourselves despise them?

In the second place, The wisdom of the world *is foolishness with God*, because it is baffled by him. Some triumphs he has occasionally allowed it to gain, in order to carry on some special purpose that his Providence had in view. Hence a splendid conqueror, or a successful conspirator, dazzle at times the public eye, and attract imitators of their characters and exploits. But, if you extensively consult ~~historical~~ annals, and much more, if you will attentively consider what is known to happen in private life, you will find the examples to be few and rare, of wicked, unprincipled men attaining fully the accomplishment of their crafty designs. — It is true, that the justice of Heaven is not, in the present state, fully manifested, by rendering to every man according to his deeds. But I believe it will be found by attentive observers, that there are two cases in which, perhaps more than in any other, the divine government has, throughout all ages, rendered itself apparent and sensible to men. These are, humbling the high imaginations of the proud, and taking the wise in their own craftiness. By many signal instances of the intervention of Providence in both these cases, God hath deeply marked the traces of an awful government, even in this introductory state; and forced a reverence of his justice upon the minds of men. As he will not permit any greatness to lift itself up against his power, so neither will he permit any art to prevail against his counsels. While the crafty project many a distant plan, and wind their way most warily and cunningly, as they think, to success; how often does the Almighty, by means of some slight and seemingly contingent event, stop the wheel at once from farther motion, and leave them to the bitterness of humbling disappointment? *He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall have them in derision. Then, it is immediately added, shall he speak to them in wrath, and vex them in sore displeasure.** The

* Psalm ii. 4, 5.

edifice of crooked policy which they had erected against his decree, was an edifice of dust: no sooner does he blow upon it with the breath of his mouth, than it falls to the ground. *The wicked are snared in their own devices. They are caught in the pit which their hands had digged. This is the purpose that is purposed upon the whole earth; and this is the hand that is stretched out upon all the nations! **

IN the third place, The wisdom of the world is *foolishness with God*; because, though it should be allowed by Providence to run, without disturbance, its fullest career, and to compass successfully whatever it had projected, yet it can produce nothing in the issue worthy of the pursuit of a truly wise man. It is a wisdom which over-reaches and counteracts itself; and instead of expected happiness, ends in misery. — If the existence of another world be admitted, can he be accounted wise, who frames his conduct solely with a view to this world, and beyond it has nothing to look for but punishment? Is he a wise man, who exchanges that which is eternal, for that which is temporary; and though it were to gain the whole world, exposes himself to lose his own soul? — But laying another world out of the question, taking things on the footing of this life *only*, still it can be clearly shown, that the crooked wisdom of the world is no better than foolishness. For what is the amount of all that this wise man hath gained, or can gain, after all the toil he has undergone, and all the sacrifices he has made, in order to attain success? He has supplanted a rival; he has defeated an enemy; he has obtained, perhaps, a splendid establishment for himself and his family. But how is all this success enjoyed? with a mind often ill at ease; with a character dubious at the best, suspected by the world in general, seen through by the judicious and discerning. For the man of the world flatters himself in vain, if he imagines that, by the plausible appearances of his behaviour, he can thoroughly conceal from the world what he is, and keep them ignorant of the hollow principles upon which he has acted. For a short time the world may be deceived; but after a man has continued for a while to act his part upon the public stage, and has been tried by the different occurrences of life, his real character never fails to be discovered. The judgment of the public on the character of men, as to their worth, probity, and honour, seldom errs. In the mean time, the advantages of fortune or station, which the man of the world has gained, after having been enjoyed for a while, become insipid to him; their first relish is gone, and he has little more to expect. He finds himself embarrassed with cares and fears. He is sensible that by many he is envied and hated; and though surrounded by low flatterers, is conscious that he is destitute of real friends. As he advances in years, all the enjoyments of his troubled prosperity are diminished more and more, and with many apprehensions he looks forward to the decline of life.

Compute now, O wise man, as thou art! what thou hast acquired by all thy selfish and intricate wisdom, by all thy refined and double conduct, thy dark and designing policy? Canst thou say that thy mind is satisfied with thy past tenour of conduct? Has thy real

* Isaiah, xiv. 26.

happiness kept pace, in any degree, with the success of thy worldly plans, or the advancement of thy fortune? Are thy days more cheerful and gay, or are thy nights more calm and free of care, than those of the plain and upright man, whom thou hast so often treated with scorn? To thine own conscience I appeal, whether thou dardest say, that aught which thou hast gained by the wisdom of the world, be a sufficient compensation for incurring the displeasure of thy Creator, for forfeiting self-approbation within thy breast, for losing the esteem of the wisest and worthiest part of mankind around thee? — *How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity, and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? How long will ye love vanity, and seek after lies?*

From what has been said of the nature and the effects of worldly wisdom, you will now judge how justly it is termed *foolishness with God*, and how much it merits the severe epithets which are given it in Scripture, of *earthly, sensual, and devilish*. Opposite to it stands the *wisdom that is from above*, which is described by an Apostle, as *pure, peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy*.* — This, and this only, is that real wisdom, which it is both our duty and our interest to cultivate. It carries every character of being far superiour to the wisdom of the world. It is masculine and generous; it is magnanimous and brave; it is uniform and consistent. The wise man of the world is obliged to shape and form his course according to the changing occurrences of the world; he is unsteady and perplexed; he trembles at every possible consequence, and is ever looking to futurity with a troubled mind. But the wise man in God's sight moves in a higher sphere. His integrity directs his course without perplexity or trouble. He inquires only what is right, becoming, and honourable for him to do. Being satisfied as to this, he asks no farther questions. The issue it is not in his power to direct; but the part which is assigned to him, he will act; secure, that come what will, in life and death, the Providence of that God whom he serves, will effectually guard all his great interests. At the same time, the spirit of this wisdom is perfectly consistent with proper foresight, and vigilant attention. It is opposed to art and cunning, not to prudence and caution. It is the mark, not of a weak and improvident, but of a great and noble mind; which will in no event take refuge in falsehood and dissimulation; which scorns deceit, because it holds it to be mean and base; and seeks no disguise, because it needs none to hide it. — Such a character is both amiable and venerable. While it ennobles the magistrate and the judge, and adds honour and dignity to the most exalted stations, it commands respect in every rank of life. When the memory of artful and crooked policy speedily sinks, and is extinguished, this true wisdom shall long preserve an honourable memorial among men, and from God shall receive everlasting glory.

* James, iii. 15. 17.

SERMON LXXXIX.

ON THE GOVERNMENT OF HUMAN AFFAIRS BY PROVIDENCE.

PROV. xvi. 9.

A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps.

MANY devices there are, and much exercise of thought and counsel ever going on among mankind. When we look abroad into the world, we behold a very busy and active scene; a great multitude always in motion, actuated by a variety of passions, and engaged in the prosecution of many different designs, where they commonly flatter themselves with the prospect of success. But, much of this labour we behold, at the same time, falling to the ground. *The race is far from being always to the swift, or the battle to the strong, or riches to men of understanding.* It plainly appears, that the efforts of our activity, how great soever they may be, are subject to the controul of a superiour invisible Power; to that Providence of Heaven, which works by secret and imperceptible, but irresistible means. Higher counsels than ours are concerned in the issues of human conduct. Deeper and more extensive plans, of which nothing is known to us, are carried on above. The line is let out, to allow us to run a certain length; but by that line we are all the while invisibly held, and are recalled and checked at the pleasure of Heaven. — Such being now the condition of man on earth, let us consider what instruction this state of things is fitted to afford us. I shall first illustrate a little farther the position in the Text, that though a *man's heart may devise his way, it is the Lord who directeth his steps*; and then point out the practical improvement to be made of this doctrine.

Among all who admit the existence of a Deity, it has been a general belief that he exercises some government over human affairs. It appeared altogether contrary to reason, to suppose that after God had erected this stupendous fabric of the universe, had beautified it with so much ornament, and peopled it with such a multitude of rational beings, he should then have thrown it out from his care, as a despised, neglected offspring, and allowed its affairs to float about at random. There was indeed one set of ancient philosophers who adopted this absurd opinion; but though they nominally allowed the existence of some beings whom they called gods, yet as they ascribed to them neither the creation nor the government of the world, they were held to be in reality Atheists.

In what manner Providence interposes in human affairs; by what means it influences the thoughts and counsels of men, and, notwithstanding the influence it exerts, leaves to them the freedom of will and choice, are subjects of a dark and mysterious nature, and which have given occasion to many an intricate controversy. Let us remember, that the manner in which God influences the motion of all the heavenly bodies, the nature of that secret power by which he is

ever directing the sun and the moon, the planets, stars, and comets, in their course through the heavens, while they appear to move themselves in a free course, are matters no less inexplicable to us, than the manner in which he influences the counsels of men. But, though the mode of divine operation remains unknown, the fact of an overruling influence is equally certain in the moral, as it is in the natural world. In cases where the fact is clearly authenticated, we are not at liberty to call its truth in question, merely because we understand not the manner in which it is brought about. Nothing can be more clear from the testimony of Scripture, than that God takes part in all that happens among mankind; directing and overruling the whole course of events so as to make every one of them answer the designs of his wise and righteous government. This is distinctly and explicitly asserted in the Text. Throughout all the sacred writings, God is represented as on every occasion, by various dispensations of his Providence, rewarding the righteous, or chastening them, according as his wisdom requires, and punishing the wicked. We cannot indeed conceive God acting as the governor of the world at all, unless his government were to extend to all the events that happen. It is upon the supposition of a particular Providence, that our worship and prayers to him are founded. All his perfections would be utterly insignificant to us, if they were not exercised on every occasion, according as the circumstances of his creatures required. The Almighty would then be no more than an unconcerned spectator of the behaviour of his subjects, regarding the obedient and the rebellious with an equal eye.

It were needless to prosecute any farther the argument in favour of a particular Providence. The experience of every one must, more or less, bear testimony to it. We need not for this purpose have recourse to those sudden and unexpected vicissitudes, which have sometimes astonished whole nations, and drawn their attention to the conspicuous hand of Heaven. We need not appeal to the history of the statesman and the warrior; of the ambitious and the enterprising. We confine our observation to those whose lives have been most plain and simple, and who had no desire to depart from the ordinary train of conduct. — In how many instances, my friends, have you found, that you are held in subjection to a higher Power, on whom depends the accomplishment of your wishes and designs? Fondly you had projected some favourite plan. You thought that you had forecast, and provided for all that might happen. You had taken your measures with such vigilant prudence, that on every side you seemed to yourself perfectly guarded and secure. But, lo! some little event hath come about, unforeseen by you, and in its consequences, at the first seemingly inconsiderable, which yet hath turned the whole course of things into a new direction, and blasted all your hopes. At other times, your counsels and plans have been permitted to succeed. You then applauded your own wisdom, and sat down to feast on the happiness you had attained. To your surprise you found, that happiness was not there; and that God's decree had appointed it to be only vanity. We labour for prosperity, and obtain it not. Unex-

pected, it is sometimes made to drop upon us, as of its own accord. The happiness of man depends on secret springs, too nice and delicate to be adjusted by human art. It requires a favourable combination of external circumstances with the state of his own mind. To accomplish on every occasion such a combination, is far beyond his power; but it is what God can at all times effect; as the whole series of external causes are arranged according to his pleasure, and the hearts of all men are in his hands, *to turn them wheresoever he wills, as rivers of water.* From the imperfection of our knowledge to ascertain what is good for us, and from the defect of our power to bring about that good when known, arise all those disappointments which continually testify, that the *way of man is not in himself*; that he is not the master of his own lot; that, though he may *devise*, it is God who *directs*; God who can make the smallest incident an effectual instrument of his Providence for overturning the most laboured plans of men.

Accident, and chance, and fortune, are words which we often hear mentioned, and much is ascribed to them in the life of man. But they are words without meaning; or, as far as they have any signification, they are no other than names for the unknown operations of Providence. For it is certain, that in God's universe nothing comes to pass causelessly, or in vain. Every event has its own determined direction. That chaos of human affairs and intrigues, where we can see no light; that mass of disorder and confusion which they often present to our view, is all clearness and order in the sight of Him who is governing and directing all, and bringing forward every event in its due time and place. *The Lord sitteth on the flood. The Lord maketh the wrath of man to praise him, as he maketh the hail and the rain obey his word. He hath prepared his throne in the heavens; and his kingdom ruleth over all. A man's heart deviseth his way, but the Lord directeth his steps.*

HAVING illustrated the doctrine of the Text, I proceed to show how it is to be improved by us. I must begin with warning you, that the doctrine I have illustrated has no tendency to supersede counsel, design, or a proper exertion of the active powers of man. Because Providence is superiour to us, it does not follow that therefore man has no part to act; or because our industry is sometimes disappointed, that therefore it is always vain. It is by the use of ordinary means, that Providence, for the most part, accomplishes its designs. *Man devising his own way*, and carrying on his own plans, has a place in the order of means which Providence employs. To exertions therefore of his own, he is called by God. His Maker framed him for action; and then only he is happy, when in action he is properly employed. To supine idleness, to a vain and presumptuous trust in Providence, while we neglect what is incumbent on us to perform, no encouragement is given in Scripture; on the contrary, threatenings are denounced against it. But the doctrine of the Text is to be improved,

In the first place, For correcting anxious and immoderate care about the future events of our life. This anxiety is the source of

much sin, and therefore is often rebuked in Scripture, as alienating the mind from God, and from the higher objects of virtue and religion, and filling the heart with passions which both annoy and corrupt it. If it be the parent of much sin, it is certainly also the offspring of great folly. For in such a state as human life has just now been represented to be, what means this mighty bustle and stir, this restless perturbation of thought and care, as if all the issues of futurity rested wholly on our conduct? — Something depends upon thyself; and there is reason, upon this account, for acting thy part with prudence and attention. But upon a hand unseen it depends, either to overturn all thy projects, or to crown them with success; and therefore, when the issue is so uncertain, thine attention should never run into immoderate care. By disquieting thyself so much about futurity, thou takest upon thy shoulders a load which is not thine, and which indeed thou art unable to bear.

The folly of such anxiety is aggravated by this consideration, that all events are under a much better and wiser direction than we could place them. Perhaps that evil which we have dreaded so much in prospect, may never be suffered to arrive. Providence may either have turned into a quite different course, that black cloud which appeared to carry the storm; or before the storm burst, our heads may be laid so low as to be out of its reach. Perhaps, also, the storm may be permitted to come upon us, and yet under its dark wings may bring to us some secret and unexpected good. *Who knoweth what is good for man all the days of his vain life, which he spendeth as a shadow?* Who knoweth this, my brethren, except God? And who consulteth it so effectually as He, who by his infinite wisdom *maketh all things work together for good to them who love him?* Is it not, then, our greatest happiness, that when *man deviseth, God directeth?* Is it not far better for us than if the case were reversed; if the all-wise God were only ineffectually to devise, and man, blind, and ignorant, and rash as he is, were to have the full direction of his own steps? — Wherefore vex not thyself in vain. To the unavoidable evils of life, add not this evil of thine own procuring, a tormenting anxiety about the success of thy designs. The great rule both of religion and wisdom is, Do thy duty, and leave the issue to Heaven. *Commit thy way unto the Lord.* Act thy part fairly, and as wisely as thou canst, for thine apparent interest; and then, with a steady and untroubled mind, wait for what God shall see meet to appoint. This is wisdom: all beyond this, is vanity and folly.

In the second place, The doctrine of the Text is calculated not only to repress anxiety, but to enforce moderation of mind in every state; it humbles the pride of prosperity, and prevents that despair which is incident to adversity. — The presumption of prosperity is the source both of vices and mischiefs innumerable. It renders men forgetful of God and religion. It intoxicates them with the love, and immerses them in the indulgence, of pleasure. It hardens their hearts to the distresses of their brethren. Now, consider, how little ground the real situation of the most prosperous man affords for this vain elation of mind. He is dependent every moment on the

pleasure of a superiour; and knows not, but Providence may be just preparing for him the most unforeseen reverses. Shall he *boast himself of to-morrow, who knoweth not what a day may bring forth?* He hath perhaps said in his heart, *My mountain stands strong; I shall never be moved.* But God needeth only to *hide his face*, and presently he is *troubled*. That little eminence on which he stood, and from which he surveyed with pride his fellow-creatures below him, was no more than an eminence of dust. The Almighty blows upon it with the breath of his mouth, and it is scattered. Belongs it to him whose tenure of prosperity is so insecure, to utter the voice of contempt, or to lift the rod of oppression over his fellows, when over his own head is stretched that high arm of heaven, which levels, at one touch, the mighty with the low?

The government of God is accompanied with this signal advantage, that at once it humbles the proud, and revives the distressed. As long as we believe in one higher than the highest, to whom all must look up, the greatest man is taught to be modest, and to feel his dependence: and the lowest man has an object of continual resource and hope. Injured by men, he can fly to that righteous Governour who rules the earth, and, from his interposition, hope for better days. Providence is the great sanctuary to the afflicted who maintain their integrity. Consolation they always find in the belief of it; and often there has issued from this sanctuary the most seasonable relief. There issues from it, at all times, this voice of comfort; *Trust in the Lord, and do good; and so thou shalt dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.** Thine enemies may conspire; *the Heathen may rage, and the people imagine a vain thing.* But he that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh; *the Lord shall hold them in derision.* For the Lord is the keeper of Israel; he is the shield of the righteous. *As the mountains are round about Jerusalem, so the Lord is round about his people from henceforth and for ever.†*

In the third place, The doctrine that has been illustrated, of the interposal of Providence in all human affairs, places the vanity and folly of all sinful plans in a very strong light. — All sin, in every view of it, must be attended with danger. He who embarks in any unjust or criminal enterprise, besides the manifest peril to his own soul, incurs the risk of his character being discovered, and of meeting with hatred, contempt, and just resentment from the world. One would think that when the consequences on one side are so dangerous, the bribe on the other side must be very high, and the prospect of success very fair and promising. Now, consider how this matter truly stands. The sinner hath against him, first, that general uncertainty which I before showed to take place in all the designs and projects formed by men. Could the most artful and best devised means always ensure success to the end we sought to obtain, some apology might then be made for departing occasionally from the path of rectitude. But it is far from being true, that such road to sure success can, on any occasion, be found. On the contrary, we every day see the most plausible and best concerted plans baffled and thrown

* Psalm xxxvii. 3.

† Psalm cxxv. 2.

to the ground; and there is nothing which on many occasions has been more remarked, than Providence seeming to make sport of the wisdom of man.

This view of things alone were sufficient to show to the sinner the insecurity and danger of the system on which he acts. But there is much more against him than this. For he, by his guilty plans, hath engaged against himself one certain and most formidable enemy, to whom he hath great reason to look up with terror. He cannot possibly believe that the righteous Governour of the universe beholds with an equal eye the designs of the virtuous who honour him, and the designs of the guilty who despise his laws, and do injustice to his servants. No; against these latter, Providence hath pointed its darts, hath bent its bow in the heavens; *the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.** Other designs may fail; but those of the wicked, God is concerned in overthrowing. It is true, that this life is not the season of rendering to every man according to his works. But though retribution does not on every occasion take place at present, yet neither is the exercise of divine justice always delayed. The history of the world is continually furnishing us with examples of the wicked *taken in their own devices*; of the crafty *snared in the works of their own hands*; of sinners *falling into the pit which themselves had digged*. How often, when signal crimes were ready to be perpetrated, hath God remarkably interposed; hath spread his shield before the just, unnerved the arm of the assassin, or struck a sudden damp into his mind at the critical moment? — Obnoxious then as the sinner is to so many dangers; exposed perpetually to the disappointment of his designs by the uncertainty of human events; exposed, over and above, to the avenging interposition of Heaven; what strange infatuation has tempted him to depart from the plain and safe path of integrity?

In the last place, From all that has been said on this subject, we clearly see how much it concerns us to perform those duties which a proper regard to Providence requires, and to obtain protection from that power which directeth and disposeth all. A more incontrovertible axiom there cannot be than this, that if man only deviseth his way, while God overrules his devices and directs his steps, an interest in God's favour is far more important than all the wisdom and ability of man. Without his favour, the wisest will be disappointed and baffled; under his protection and guidance, the simple are led in a plain and sure path. — In vain would the giddy and profane throw Providence out of their thoughts, and affect to think and act, as if all depended on themselves. This boldness of self-sufficiency is affectation, and no more. For, moments there are, when the man of stoutest heart feels the strong subjection under which he is held, and would gladly grasp at the aid of Heaven. As long as human affairs proceed in a smooth train, without any alarming presages of change or danger, the man of the world may remain pleased with himself, and be fully confident in his own powers. But whose life continues long so undisturbed? Let any uncommon violence shake the elements around him, and threaten him with destruction;

* Psalm xxiv. 16.

let the aspect of public affairs be so lowering as to forebode some great calamity; or, in his private concerns, let some sudden change arrive to shatter his fortune, or let sickness, and the harbingers of approaching death, show him his frailty; and how ready will he then be to send up prayers from the heart, that Providence would befriend and relieve him? Religion, my friends, is not a matter of theory and doubt. Its foundations are laid deep in the nature and condition of man. It lays hold of every man's feelings. In every man's heart and conscience it has many witnesses to its importance and reality.

Let us then neglect no means which may be of avail for procuring the grace and favour of that Divine Providence on which so much depends. Let no duties be overlooked which belong to us as subjects of God: devout worship, and grateful praises for all his blessings; humble trust in his goodness, and implicit submission to his will; and constant and cheerful obedience to his laws. Let us be thankful that God hath clearly made known all that he requires of us in order to be accepted in his sight; and that not only he has revealed the rule of duty, but also hath pointed out to us in the Gospel, the direct method of reconciliation with him, through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Providence hath condescended to become our instructor in this great article; hath taught us in what way our sins may be forgiven, our imperfect services be accepted, and an interest in the divine grace be attained by means of our Redeemer. Inexcusable we must be, if all this offered grace we shall wantonly throw at our feet. In a world so full of vicissitudes and uncertainty, let us take pains to secure to ourselves one resting-place; one habitation that cannot be moved. By piety and prayer, by faith, repentance, and a good life, let us seek the friendship of the Most High; so shall he who *directeth the steps of man now*, conduct our path in *such a* course as shall bring us in the end to himself.

SERMON XC.

ON PRAYER.

PSALM lxxv. 2.

O Thou that hearest prayer, unto Thee shall all flesh come!

THE Supreme Being is represented under many amiable characters in the Sacred Writings; as the *Father of Mercies*, the *God of Love*, the *Author of every good and perfect gift*. But there is no character which carries more comfort, or which renders God so properly the object of confidence and trust, as this, of his being the *Hearer of Prayer*. This view of the Almighty accommodates his perfections to our necessities and wants, and in our present frail and distressed state affords a constant refuge to which we can fly. *Unto Thee shall all flesh come*. To Thee, shall an indigent world look up for the supply of their wants; to Thee, shall the proudest sinner, at some

time or other, be compelled to bow; to Thee, shall the distressed and afflicted have recourse, as to their last relief and hope.

Prayer is a duty essential to natural religion. Wherever the light of nature taught men to acknowledge the being of a God, to that God also it directed them to pray. In the Christian revelation, great stress is laid upon this duty, and great encouragement given to it. Our blessed Saviour not only set the example himself, and enjoined the practice to his followers, but thought it worthy his express instruction to teach them in what manner to pray, and even to put words in their mouth. We are assured that prayers are not in vain; but that *as the eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, so his ears are open to their cry*; that if we ask aright, we shall receive; if we seek, we shall find; if we knock, it shall be opened to us. It is, indeed, hard to say, whether Prayer is to be most properly considered as a duty incumbent on all, or as a privilege allowed to them. But a blessed circumstance it is, that our duty and our privilege thus concur in one; that we are commanded to do what our wants naturally dictate to be done; even to ask what is good from God, who *giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not*. — In treating of this subject, it will be proper to consider, first, the nature and the subjects of Prayer; next, its proper qualifications; and lastly, the advantages and blessings which attend it.

I. THE Nature of Prayer supposes, in the first place, That we have a just sense of our own wants and miseries, and of our dependence on God for relief. To be suitably impressed with this sense, we need only think what our present situation is. We live in a world where every thing around us is dark and uncertain. When we look back on the past, we must remember that there we have met with much disappointment and vanity. When we look forward to the future, all is unknown. We are liable there to many dangers which we cannot foresee; and to many which we foresee approaching, yet know not how to defend ourselves against them. We are often ignorant what course we can steer with safety; nay, so imperfect is our own wisdom, and so great the darkness which covers futurity, that while we imagine that we are in the road to prosperity, we are often rushing blindly into the most fatal evils. — Besides these contingencies of life, which make us feel so deeply the necessity of looking up to some more powerful Guide and Protector, there are other circumstances in our state which lead to reflections still more alarming. We know that we are the subjects of a supreme righteous Governour, to whom we are accountable for our conduct. We were sent into this world by his appointment, and we are removed from it at his decree. How soon the call for our removal may be given, none of us know; but this we profess to believe, that upon our going hence we are to be brought into new and unknown habitations, suitable to our behaviour here. Who amongst us can say, that he is perfectly ready to appear before his Creator and Judge, and to give an account to him for all the actions of his life? How much do the best of us stand in need of mercy and forgiveness for our offences past, and of direction and assistance from Heaven to guide us in our future way?

What reason to dread that, if we be left entirely to ourselves, we will be in the utmost danger of departing from virtue and from happiness, and of leaving life under the displeasure of Him who is to judge us? — While with this sense of our imperfections, our dangers, and our guilt, we come to the Hearer of Prayer, we must, in the next place,

Pray to God, in the belief that with him there is power which can give us relief, and goodness which will incline him to give it. Prayer supposes a full persuasion that his Providence rules and governs all; that through all futurity his eye penetrates; that there are no events of our life in which he interposes not; that he knows the most secret motions of our hearts; and that to the hearts of all men he has access, by avenues unknown to us, and can turn them according to his pleasure. It supposes, at the same time, a firm confidence in the declarations he has made in his word, that a plan is established for dispensing grace to fallen and guilty mankind, through a great Redeemer. It supposes a humble hope that, as he *knows our frame, and remembers we are dust*, he will not reject the supplications of the penitent returning sinner; that he is one who hath no pleasure in our sorrows and distress, but desires the happiness of his creatures, and beholds with complacency the humble and sincere worshipper.

Now these things being supposed, this just sense of our own imperfections and guilt, and this proper impression of the divine nature, when the soul is in this posture of devotion, breathing forth its sorrows and its wants before its Creator, and imploring from him protection and aid, it cannot but give vent to the high conceptions with which it will then be affected, of God's supreme perfection. This of course becomes the foundation of that part of devotion which is styled adoration or praise. — As it is the experience of past goodness which warms the heart of the worshipper, and encourages his present supplication, he will naturally be led to a grateful celebration of the mercies of Heaven; whence thanksgiving becomes an essential part of his devotion. — As he cannot put up petitions without acknowledging his wants, and as his wants are closely connected with his frailty and ill-deserving, hence the most humble confession of guilt must necessarily enter into Prayer. — If there be any terms on which we may expect the Deity to be most propitious; if there be any meritorious Intercessor through whom we may prefer our request to him, this assuredly will be the method which the pious worshipper will choose for addressing the Almighty; and this will be the ground of his praying in the name of Christ, sending up his petitions to God through his beloved Son, whom he heareth always.

Thus it appears, that there is a just foundation for Prayer, in all its parts, naturally laid in the present circumstances of man, and in the relation in which he stands to God. But as petition is the chief and most distinguishing part of Prayer, it will be requisite that we consider particularly what those requests are, which are proper to be offered up to God. These may all be classed under three heads: first, requests for temporal blessings; next, for spiritual mercies; and lastly, intercessions for the welfare of others.

WITH regard to temporal blessings, though men may lay a re-

strain upon themselves in the expressions which they utter in Prayer, yet it is much to be suspected, that the inward wishes of their hearts for such blessings are often the most fervent of any. To wish and pray for the advantages of life, is not forbidden. Our Saviour hath so far countenanced it, as to command us to pray that God would *give us our daily bread*; that is, as his words have been always understood, that he would bestow what is necessary for the sustenance and comfort of life. Yet the very sound of the words retrenches every superfluous and extravagant wish. Not for riches and honours, for great advancement or long life, or for numerous and flourishing families, has he given us any encouragement to pray. Foreign are such things to the real improvement, foreign very often to the true happiness of man. Foolishly they may be wished for, when the wish accomplished would prove our ruin. Let health and peace, contentment and tranquillity, bound the humble Prayer which we send up to Heaven; that God may *feed us with food convenient for us*; that whatever our outward circumstances are, they may be blessed to us by him, and accompanied with a quiet mind. Even health and peace themselves may not always prove blessings. Sweet and desirable as they seem, God may, at certain times, foresee their tendency to corrupt our hearts, and may, in mercy, reject a prayer for them, which, on our part, may be allowably put up. For the nature of all temporal things is such, that they have not one fixed and stable character, but may be convertible on different occasions either into good or ill; and, therefore, some reserve in our wish must always be maintained; and to the wiser judgment of God it must be left to determine what is fit to be bestowed, and what to be withheld. — But this we may lawfully pray, that, as far as to God seems meet, he would make our state comfortable, and our days easy and tranquil; that he would save us from falling into any severe and extreme distress; that he would preserve to us the enjoyment of those friends and comforts that we most love; or if he bereave us of any of them, that he would in mercy assist and support us under the loss; in fine, that he would so order our lot, that we may be kept as free from pain, trouble, and anguish, as shall be consistent with the higher improvements of our souls, in piety, virtue, and wisdom.

In the next place, With regard to spiritual mercies, we are unquestionably allowed to be more fervent and explicit in our requests at the throne of grace. God can never be displeased in hearing us implore from him those graces and endowments of the soul, that beautify us in his sight, that are good for all men, good at all times, indeed the only certain and immutable goods; and therefore to these only pertains that earnestness, that urgency of Prayer, which is represented as acceptable to the Almighty. — Our petitions of this nature, our Saviour has ranked under the two great heads, of forgiveness for past offences, and deliverance from future temptations. It is chiefly for these important blessings, that we are to prostrate ourselves before our Father in Heaven, begging of him, who knows our heart with all its frailties, that he would accept our sincere repentance, and pardon our errors for the sake of Jesus Christ. We must

earnestly pray that he would strengthen us by his grace to resist the temptations that hereafter may assault us; and whatever he appoints to befall us without, may enable us to preserve a good conscience within; that he may teach us to know ourselves, and assist us to controul and govern our passions; that he may endow us with temperance in prosperity, and resignation under adversity; that in no situation of life we may be allowed to forget what we owe to our Maker and Redeemer; and that after having discharged the duties of life, through the assistance of Divine grace, with some measure of integrity and honour, we may be prepared for going through the last scene of life without dismay; and when we have made a decent and peaceful retreat from this world, we may then find ourselves in some better and happier state.

IN the first place, It is to be remembered that intercessions for the welfare of others form a material part of Prayer. The sincere worshipper is not to consider himself as a single and separate being, confining his concern wholly to himself. Our Saviour has initiated us into a more noble and enlarged spirit of devotion, when he taught us to begin with praying that the kingdom of God may be advanced over all, and that mankind may be rendered as happy by doing his will, as the angels are in heaven. When we bow our knee to the common Father, let it be like affectionate members of his family, desiring the prosperity of all our brethren. In particular, the happiness of our friends and relations, of those whom we love, and by whom we are loved, ought then to be near our heart; praying that the Almighty may be our God, and the God of our friends and family, for ever; that he may watch over them, and bless them; and may make us long happy in mutual comfort and affection. We ought to remember our benefactors before God, and pray for a return of Divine blessings on their head. The distressed and afflicted ought to share our sympathy; remembering them *who suffer adversity, as being ourselves in the body*; and shedding the friendly tear at the thought of human woe. Our enemies themselves ought not to be forgotten in our prayers: in fine, our prayers ought to be an exercise of extensive benevolence of heart; a solemn testimony offered up to the God of Love, of our kind and charitable affection to all men.

BUT now, after what has been suggested concerning the proper subjects of Prayer, I am aware that it may be said by some, To what purpose is all this detail? — Do we propose, by our prayers, to give to the Supreme Being any new information, regarding our situation, of which he is not possessed. Does He not already know all our wants and distresses; and will He not be prompted by his goodness and wisdom to do for us in such circumstances, whatever is fit and proper to be done? Do we imagine that by the importunity of our solicitations and requests, He can be prevailed upon to alter his purpose, or depart from his system in the government of the world, in order to gratify our desires? — Such objections against the reasonableness of prayer, have been often urged with all the parade of scepticism. Though, on the first view, they may carry some appear-

ance of speciousness, yet on a slight discussion they fall to the ground; for they all rest on a mistaken idea of the nature and design of prayer. No man in his sober senses could ever believe that, by lifting his feeble voice to Heaven, he could convey to the ear of the Almighty any new knowledge or information. None but the most ignorant could imagine, that by his prayers, he could raise any new emotions in the unchangeable Sovereign of the universe, and prevail upon him to alter his decrees in consequence of his request. — The efficacy of Prayer lies, not in working a change upon God, but in working a change upon ourselves; in begetting or improving right dispositions of heart, and thereby making us fit subjects of the Divine mercy. It is not for the sake of our asking, that God grants the requests we prefer in prayer; but as our asking, with proper dispositions, produces that frame of mind which qualifies us to receive. — Hence Prayer has been appointed by God as an instrument for improving our nature, and is required on our part as a condition of receiving his favours. Thus, when upon a certain occasion he had by his Prophet predicted and promised circumstances of prosperity to the Jewish nation, the Prophet was directed to add, *Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet for this be enquired of by the house of Israel to do it for them.** — Is there any one who would say, that it is not incumbent on all rational creatures to feel their dependence on the God who has formed them, and to refer to him all the blessings which they either enjoy or hope to receive? Would not the want of such becoming sentiments be altogether unworthy and sinful? And if they are such sentiments as ought to be entertained, must it not be proper to express them by words in prayer, and thereby to strengthen the impression of them on our minds?

But in truth there is no occasion for entering into any long discussion of argument in order to evince the reasonableness of prayer. It is the natural dictate of the human heart. Though in the days of prosperity and ease it may, like other duties, have been neglected and forgotten, yet on all great and trying occasions, men are prompted by an irresistible impulse to lift their eyes, and address their voice to Heaven. Who is there, for instance, that feeling himself cruelly oppressed by injustice and violence, without any prospect of procuring redress, can forbear appealing to a Power that rules above, and invoking Divine interposition to vindicate his innocence, and avenge his wrongs? Who that is standing by the death-bed of a beloved friend, of a spouse, a brother, or a son, and sees them struggling with the last agonies, but finds himself impelled to look up to Heaven, and to pray from the heart that where men can give no aid, God would in his mercy support the dying man? Was there ever a sinner so hardened, that when he finds himself leaving the world, and standing on the brink of an unknown eternity, is not disposed with earnest and trembling voice to pray that God would forgive his errors, and receive in peace his departing spirit? In such situations as these, man feels what he truly is, and speaks the native unadulterated language of the heart. — Accordingly, throughout all

* Ezek. xxxvi. 37.

ages and nations, the obligation to Prayer as a duty has been recognised, and its propriety has been felt. Over all the world, even among the most savage tribes, temples have been built, worshippers have assembled in crowds; and the wildest superstition has, by the various forms of homage which it adopted, borne testimony to this truth, that there is some God, to whom, as *the Hearer of Prayer, all flesh should come.*

IN order that prayer may produce its proper effect, there are certain qualifications necessarily belonging to it, which come next to be considered.

One of the first and chief of these is seriousness, or an attentive and solemn frame of mind, in opposition to thoughts that wander, and to words that drop forth unmeaning from the lips. One would think it unnecessary to mention such a qualification to be requisite, when we are to be employed in so solemn an act as an immediate address to our Maker. Yet there is ground to apprehend, that an admonition of this nature is necessary to be given to many professed Christians. Men from their childhood have been so oft accustomed to repeat certain expressions, which they call, saying prayers, with little understanding, and less attention to what they say, that the habit of it is apt to be continued throughout life; as if the mere uttering of words, or presenting themselves, at set times, in a certain posture before God, had some charms in it to attract the blessings of Heaven. — My brethren, this is trifling with one of the most important exercises in which the human mind can be employed; it is turning devotion into childish folly. Let us never forget that it is the heart which must pray. The heart may pray when no words are uttered. But if the heart be not engaged in Prayer, all the words we can utter are no better than rude offensive sounds in the ear of the Almighty. — Collect then thy mind within itself, before thou preferrest a single petition; nay, before thou pronouncest the name of God in prayer. Be alone with him and thine own soul; under the same impression as if thou wert just about to appear before the judgment-seat of that God to whom thou prayest.

To seriousness, we must join affection in prayer; I mean that devotion of the heart which is inspired by gratitude and love, in distinction from forced prayer, or what is unwillingly preferred from servile fear, or mere regard to decency. We must come into the presence of God, as to a Father in Heaven; not to a hard and oppressive master, to whom we are obliged to pay obeisance to prevent him from destroying us. — Profound humility is perfectly consistent with this affectionate spirit in prayer. No presumptuous familiarity must enter into our addresses to God. We are enjoined to serve him *with reverence and godly fear*. Our devotion will be most fervent and affectionate, when we entertain the humblest thoughts of ourselves, joined with the most exalted conceptions of that God to whom we pray. *Remember that God is in heaven, and thou art on earth; therefore let thy words be few.**

Faith is a qualification of Prayer expressly required in Scripture.

* Eccles. v. 2.

He that prayeth, saith the Apostle James, *let him ask in faith, nothing wavering.** — By faith in Prayer, two things are meant: first, a general persuasion that God is a Being of infinite goodness and mercy; to whom, therefore, the prayers of his creatures are not put up in vain. *He that cometh unto God must believe, not only that he is, but that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*†: without some belief of this kind, prayers were altogether superfluous. For who would send up supplications to a God who was believed to be inaccessible to his creatures, and to have no regard to their circumstances and wants? — At the same time, much ground we have to be conscious of our own unworthiness, and to tremble at the remembrance of it, when, we address ourselves to Heaven; and therefore, secondly, to pray in faith is, in the Scripture sense of it, to pray in the name of Christ; that is, in the faith that it is through his merits and mediation only we can find acceptance with God. We acknowledge our guilt; we disclaim all trust in our own righteousness; and implore grace from God on account of what his Son has done and suffered for us. This is the clear and express doctrine of the New Testament. *We have boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus. We have this new and living way which he hath consecrated for us within the veil. Having this High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith.*‡

HAVING thus pointed out the chief and most essential qualifications of Prayer, it remains that I lay some considerations before you, to show the importance and advantages of it.

In the first place, Prayer is one of the most powerful means of recalling our minds from the vanities of life to serious thoughts; to a proper sense of God and our duty; and to all the high objects with which we are intimately connected as rational and immortal beings. Surrounded, as we are, with the objects and pleasures of the world; busied with its avocations, and continually immersed in its pursuits, man would become altogether the victim of sense, and a prey to its temptations; if there were not some stated occasions which brought him home to himself, and to the thoughts of another world. Prayer has a much more impressive effect for this purpose, than can be expected from simple meditation. An immediate and solemn address to an omniscient Being, in whose presence we consider ourselves as then particularly sisted, tends to produce a higher degree of serious and awful recollection, than would arise from a mere soliloquy of the mind with itself. In Prayer, the soul approaches to the borders of an invisible world, and acts as a spirit holding intercourse with the Father of spirits. It drops for a time the remembrance of its earthly connexions, to dwell among everlasting objects. Prayer, by this means, both composes and purifies the heart; it gives the soul its proper elevation towards God, and has a happy effect to counterwork the dangerous impressions made by the corruptions of the world around us.

In the next place, Prayer is useful, not only as a corrective of our natural levity and forgetfulness of God, but as an actual exercise of

* James, i. 6.

Heb. xi. 6.

† Heb. x. 19—22.

the best affections of our nature, which are thereby confirmed and strengthened. As far as Prayer is not a mere emission of empty words, but speaks, as it ought to do, the language of the heart, it is an assemblage of all the affections which constitute piety. It implies the highest sentiments of reverence and adoration, of love and gratitude to God, of trust in his mercy, and of faith in our blessed Redeemer, all animating the heart. Whatever nourishes such affections as these in the soul, gives strength and support at the same time to active virtue; and thereby prepares and assists us for every duty of life.—With respect to ourselves, the view which Prayer gives, of our necessities and wants, of our sins and offences against God, and of the dangers which we have thereby incurred, produces becoming humility of mind. Prostrate before that great Being whom we have so much offended, all the pride of man is laid in the dust. He is impressed with a sense of what he truly is, and taught how far removed from what he ought to be. By the prayers he puts up for being assisted to repent of past follies, and to make improvements for the future in virtue, the desire of virtue is cherished, and the pursuit of it excited; and if this desire after virtue which is expressed in Prayer be genuine, it is a degree of goodness already in some measure begun within the heart.—Prayer is, at the same time, an exercise of benevolence towards men, as well as of piety towards God; when, as was before observed, not merely as individuals, but as members of the great family of God, we come before our heavenly Father, and express our affectionate wishes for all our brethren.—While Prayer in this manner gives exertion to many of the highest parts of goodness, it is attended moreover with this great advantage, that it tends to fortify the worshipper in the practice of all his duties. For it impresses him with a sense of God as the great friend and protector of righteousness in the world: to whom, therefore, all righteous men may look up with confidence and hope; whose strength is more than sufficient for their weakness; whose gracious aid none that served him ever implored in vain.

In the last place, Prayer is important, not only as a means of high improvement in religion, but as an instrument of consolation and relief under the distresses of life. How many situations are found in the world, where men have no resource left to them but prayer to God! How forlorn would the persecuted and afflicted, the sad and the sorrowful be, if even this last sanctuary were shut against them; if they had no Protector in Heaven to whom they could look up in the hours of anguish!—We all know what a relief it is to be able to unbosom our griefs to some friend whom we believe compassionate and kind, even though it be not in his power to give us any effectual aid. In our heavenly father, we can look up, not only to one in whom *compassions flow*, who *knows our frame*, *remembers we are dust*, and *pities us as a father pitieth his children*; but to One whose arm is all-powerful, either to support us under our distress, or, if to his wisdom it seem meet, to relieve us altogether from it.—Hence, Prayer is so often the last retreat of the miserable. Where men can give them no aid, *God is their present help*. To him they can pour forth

those secret griefs, which to men they sometimes cannot disclose. He hears these groans of the labouring heart, which no words can utter, and circumstances which would expose our requests to be despised by the world, prevent not our prayers from finding acceptance with God. It is his character to *hear the cry of the poor, and to regard the prayer of the destitute*: He is the *helper of them who have no help of man*.—Hence, Prayer may be termed the Temple of Tranquillity to the unhappy; where their minds are soothed, and their cares and sorrows are for a time hushed and forgotten. It may justly be said, that there only, on this side of the grave, *the wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest. There, the prisoners rest together; they hear no more the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are there; and the servant is free from his master.**

THE reasonableness of Prayer as a duty, and the advantages attending it, being such as I have now endeavoured briefly to set forth, there is no wonder that so many repeated recommendations of it occur in the Sacred Writings; and that we are enjoined to be *servent in Prayer*, to be *instant in Prayer*; nay, to *pray without ceasing*.† — By such precepts I do not understand that we are bound to frequent repetitions of long and tedious prayers. Our Saviour, in his excellent discourse on this subject, has sufficiently cautioned us against the hypocrisy of those who *use vain repetitions, and think that they shall be heard for their much speaking*.‡ But besides the stated times of both public and private Prayer which we ought devoutly to observe, there is a habit of devotion, in occasional elevations of the soul towards God, which highly deserves to be cultivated. A thousand occurrences which happen when we are engaged in the affairs of the world, and a thousand objects which present themselves to our view in the earth and the heavens when we are solitary and alone, may suggest matter of devout ejaculation towards God. By cherishing such a habit, we preserve on our minds the native spirit of Prayer. We correct those evil dispositions which intercourse with the world is always apt to introduce; we improve our contemplation of the objects which surround us, into an act of devotion; and either from the crowded city, or the solitary field, can send up to Heaven that homage of the heart, which is no less acceptable to the Almighty, than if it arose in vocal form from the midst of the temple. In this sense I understand the injunction given to *pray without ceasing*.—And surely, my brethren, when we consider the high value of those blessings for which we depend on Heaven, it must appear to every reflecting mind, that we cannot be too earnest in our supplications to obtain them. To what purpose tend all our present solicitude and care; all the application of the thoughtful, and all the industry of the active and diligent? Is it not in order to pass through life, contented, easy, and happy? But can you pass through life with contentment and happiness, unless you enjoy peace within, a good conscience, and a comfortable hope of a future existence? Are not all these things directly and immediately the gifts of God, imparted by him to the souls of men? And can you expect to receive

* Job, iii. 17—19.

† 1 Thess. v. 17.

‡ Matt. vi.

such gifts, unless you confess your dependence on Him who bestows them, and implore them from that gracious God, who giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not?

SERMON XCI. 74.

ON THE LAST JUDGMENT.

2 COR. v. 10.

For we must all appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.

THESE words present to our view the great event which is to determine the fate of all mankind. No article of Christian faith is more clearly ascertained in Scripture, is of greater importance in itself, and more worthy to dwell upon our minds than this, of the final Judgment of God. It adds solemnity to every part of religion; it introduces an awful seriousness into our thoughts, by placing in the most striking light the close connection between our present behaviour and our everlasting happiness or misery. In the Gospel, it is described with so many circumstances of awe and terour, as may, to many, render the consideration of this subject dark and disagreeable. But we must remember, that though religion be often employed to sooth and comfort the distressed, and though this be one of its most salutary effects, yet this is not the only purpose to which it is to be applied by ministers of the Gospel. In the midst of that levity and dissipation with which the world abounds, it is necessary to awaken the giddy and unthinking, by setting before them, in full view, all the dangers they incur by their conduct. — *Knowing the terour of the Lord*, adds the Apostle, in the verse immediately following the Text, *we persuade men*. — In treating of this subject, I shall, in the first place, state the arguments which reason affords for the belief of a Judgment to come; and shall next show the improvements which we ought to make of the particular discoveries the Gospel hath made to us concerning it.

I. By taking a view of the arguments which reason affords for the belief of a general Judgment, our faith in the discoveries of the Gospel will receive confirmation, from discerning their consonance with the natural sentiments of the human heart.

In the first place, and as the foundation of all, I begin with observing, that there is in the nature of things a real and eternal difference between right and wrong, between a virtuous and an immoral conduct; a difference which all men discern of themselves, and which leads them unavoidably to think of some actions as deserving blame and punishment, and of others as worthy of praise and reward. If all actions were conceived as indifferent in their nature, no idea of justice and retribution would be found among men; they would not

consider themselves as in any view accountable for their actions to any superior. But this is far from being the case. Every man feels himself under a law; the law of his being, which he cannot violate without being self-condemned. The most ignorant heathen knows and feels, that when he has committed an unjust or cruel action, he has committed a crime, and deserves punishment. Never was there a nation on the face of the earth, among whom there did not prevail a consciousness that, by inhumanity and fraud, they justly exposed themselves to the hatred of those around them, and to the displeasure of any secret invisible power that ruled the world. This, therefore, may be asumed as an incontrovertible principle, that the difference of good and evil in actions, is not founded on arbitrary opinions or institutions, but in the nature of things, and the nature of man; and accords with the universal sense of the human kind. This being the case, it is certainly reasonable,

In the second place, To think that the Ruler of the world will make some distinction among his creatures according to their actions; and if this distinction be not made, or only imperfectly made in this life, there will be some future state of existence in which he will openly reward and punish. To suppose God to be a mere indifferent spectator of the conduct of his creatures, regarding with an equal eye the evil and the good, is in effect to annihilate his existence; as it contradicts every notion which mankind have entertained of a Supreme Being as just and good. It would represent him as inferiour in character to many of his creatures on earth; as there is no man of tolerable virtue and humanity who is not shocked at the commission of atrocious crimes, and who does not desire to see the guilty punished, the innocent protected, and the virtuous rewarded. — If there exist at this God who governs the world, (and what nation has not acknowledged him to exist?) as a governour he undoubtedly will act; and as such, will, somewhere, and at some period or other, reward and punish, according as his creatures obey, or violate, that law which he originally implanted in their hearts. — Whether this be completely done in the present world, is not a point that requires long discussion. The experience of all ages has shown, that pain and pleasure, prosperity and adversity, are not at present distributed by Providence exactly according to the measure of men's probity and worth, but are apparently scattered with a promiscuous hand. Hence the ancient complaint, that *all things come alike to all men; that there is one event to the righteous and the wicked; that to poverty and disappointment the righteous are often left, while the tabernacles of robbers prosper.* — An inference from hence might at first view arise, not favourable to the doctrine we now support; but we have to observe,

In the third place, That although full retribution be not as yet made to the good and to the evil, yet plain marks appear of a government already begun and carried on by God in the universe, though not fully completed; marks of his favouring and taking part with virtue, and of his providing punishments for vice. This observation deserves to be particularly attended to; as it is one of the chief argu-

ments for a future Judgment. — In the present system of things, had the righteous been uniformly happy, and the wicked at all times miserable, future Judgment might have appeared unnecessary, as justice had already taken place. On the other hand, had no distinction whatever taken place in the present system between the righteous and the wicked as to happiness and misery, there might have been ground to suspect that, since universal disorder at present prevailed, disorder would ever continue, and never be rectified by any future Judgment. But neither of these suppositions is founded in fact. The present state of the moral world is neither a state of complete justice and order, nor of absolute disorder, but a state of order and justice begun and carried to a certain length, though left as yet imperfect. — Observe, my brethren, that, in the whole structure and constitution of things, God hath shown himself to be favourable to virtue, and inimical to vice and guilt. He hath made a fixed provision for happiness to virtue, by the powerful recommendation which it carries to universal esteem and love; by the manifold benefits which it procures to society; by the health, peace, and comfort of mind which it brings to the virtuous man. At the same time, from the crimes of the wicked, a multitude of miseries is made infallibly to spring; loss of character and esteem, and of confidence and regard in society; health always impaired by vice; and all comfortable enjoyment of life disturbed by an uneasy companion, which the sinner carries about with him in his own conscience, upbraiding him for his crimes, and threatening him with the displeasure of the Almighty.

These are not things of casual or accidental occurrence, but of universal experience, taking their rise from the constitution of our nature, and from the fixed laws which regulate human events. They show us what the direct tendency of virtue and vice is appointed by Providence to be; and if this tendency be not, in every instance, carried into effect, owing to circumstances which belong to our present state of probation and discipline, yet such an established natural tendency carries a sufficient intimation of the will and pleasure of our Creator. We see his *throne already set for Judgment*. By his beginning in this world both to reward and to punish, we clearly behold him acting as a governour and a judge, and are led to prognosticate what course he will hereafter hold. By the constitution of things which he has fixed here, he has as plainly signified that he favours the virtuous and is displeased with the wicked, as if he had declared it to us by a voice from the clouds. — Although the present state of mankind requires that the just should sometimes suffer, and the sinner be allowed to prosper, the strongest presumption still remains that there is a period to come, when God will complete his righteous government, by making the one fully blest, and rendering the other as miserable as they deserve to be; especially as we can observe,

In the fourth place, That a satisfactory account may be given why Judgment is at present postponed, and complete retribution not made, either to the good or the bad. We are to take notice, that even among men, the wisdom and justice of government do not con-

sist in immediately rewarding and punishing on every occasion, but in exercising those acts of government publicly, at such times and with such circumstances as may have the most powerful effect for the benefit of society. A similar consideration perfectly accounts for the full execution of justice being delayed by God in this world; for rewards and punishments being only begun here, but left unfinished. Were they completed in this world to their full extent, all the purposes of a state of trial and discipline would be defeated. No room would be left for exercise and improvement to the good in many virtues, if they were never to undergo any trials; if they felt full reward immediately conferred on every righteous action they performed, and saw the wicked instantly cut off, as soon as a crime was committed. For salutary discipline, therefore, to the good, in order to improve their virtues; and from patience to the bad, in order to give them room for repentance; it was fit and wise that final Judgment should at present be postponed. Divine justice stands for a while, as behind the veil, and leaves men at full scope to act according to their different dispositions, that their real characters may be fully displayed; the fidelity of the upright be tried and proved, and the obstinately wicked left without excuse. — The delay of Judgment, therefore, and the seeming inequality that now takes place in the ways of Providence, is so far from forming any ground of suspicion that Judgment will never come, that, on the contrary, it is an argument of the wisdom of the living government, and necessarily enters into the plans it is now carrying forward.

Such are the presumptions which reason furnishes for rendering it more than probable that, at the conclusion of human things, God will render to every one according to his works. They may serve to strengthen our faith; but on mere reasonings our faith rests not. God in his mercy has given us surer light in an article of so great importance. To the consideration, therefore, of the discoveries which the Gospel of Christ hath made to us, we now proceed.

~ 11. You all know how often we are assured in the New Testament, that God hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness; a day and an hour which no man knoweth, but which is fixed in the counsels of Heaven. In the Sacred Writings a very particular account is given us of the whole procedure of that solemn day, accompanied with an assemblage of circumstances of the most awful and terrific nature. The scene is such as forbids all attempts to heighten, or even to do it justice by human description. Beneath such a subject all imagination sinks. The efforts of the declaimer or the poet are here alike in vain. — We are informed that the Last Day shall be ushered in by signs in the sun, and signs in the moon and stars; upon the earth, distress of nations with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after the things which are coming on the earth, for the powers of Heaven shall be shaken. The sound of a trumpet shall be heard, at which the dead shall rise out of their graves. The sign of the Son of Man shall appear. He shall come in a cloud with power and great glory, and all the holy Angels with him. A great white throne shall be

set, and He shall sit thereon in his glory. Before Him shall be gathered all nations. Books shall be opened, and the dead shall be judged out of the things which are found written in the Books. He shall separate the righteous from the wicked as a shepherd divideth the sheep from the goats; and he shall set the righteous on his right hand, and the wicked on his left! Then shall he say to them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. To them on his left hand he shall say, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the Devil and his angels; and these shall go into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal.* — Whether every one of the circumstances here set forth is to be understood in a strictly literal sense, or with some measure of mystical and allegorical interpretation, it is not easy to determine, nor is it essential for us to know. Regard must be had to the figurative style frequently employed by the sacred writers, of which we find so many examples in the prophetic writings and the Book of Revelations, wherein those spiritual divine things, which are above our conception, are set forth under such representations of sensible objects and appearances as are most calculated to strike and impress our minds. The circumstance, for instance, of books being opened before the Judge, as containing a register of every man's actions, and of the dead being judged from what had been written in those books, is plainly a metaphorical allusion to what is practised among men; designed merely to convey the strongest impression of God's strict and accurate observation of the minutest particulars of men's behaviour on earth. It is sufficient for us to be satisfied, that whatever tremendous grandeur may attend the Judgment of the Last Day, it will be conducted in such a manner as shall be perfectly suitable to the perfections of the Almighty. — Resting on such facts as are plainly and explicitly revealed on this subject, let us consider,

In the first place, The Person who is to act as Judge, even the eternal Son of God. We must all, says the Text, *appear before the judgment-seat of Christ*. This is repeated in many passages of the New Testament. The day of Judgment is termed *the day of the Son of Man*. The Father, we are told, *judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment to the Son*.† — This constitution of Providence is, in many respects, wise, fit, and gracious. It was highly proper that he who once, in the cause of God and mankind, stood as a criminal before impious judges on earth, should be thus signally vindicated and honoured, by appearing in the illustrious character of the Judge of all the earth. It was fit that the character of Judge and Sovereign should be made known, as added to the other characters he bore, of Priest and Prophet, in order to give weight and authority to all his precepts, from the awful consideration that on our obedience to him depends our everlasting fate. — But the most striking and important circumstance in this appointment of Providence is, the assurance which it affords us of the perfect equity of this final Judgment. For here we behold a Judge who is taken, as we may say, from among ourselves. He dwelt among us on earth, and did not disclaim to call us brethren.

* Luke, xxi. 25. Dan. vii. 9. Matt. xxv. 31.

† John, v. 22.

He knows experimentally what human passions and human frailties are; and what the Apostle to the Hebrews says of him as a Priest, may be as fully applied to him as a Judge. *We have not a Judge who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but One who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.* The infinite majesty of the Supreme Being is an object at all times overwhelming to the mind. In the situation of a Judge particularly, it might fill us with dismay. But in the person of our blessed Redeemer, that majesty is placed in a milder light. The attribute of mercy comes forward in so conspicuous a manner, as to allay the dread we would otherwise entertain. To the obstinate and hardened sinner, the Judgment of our Saviour may indeed justly occasion terror. Well may they be afraid of appearing before the judgment-seat of Christ, who have scorned and despised him and his religion. But to the pious and the humble, no consideration can carry more comfort than that they are to appear in Judgment before him who so loved the human race as to die for them; and from whom, therefore, may be expected every favourable allowance which their case will admit. — From the contemplation of the Judge, let us,

In the second place, Turn our thoughts towards the persons who are to be judged. These, we are again and again informed, shall be all mankind; both the quick and the dead; those who shall then be found upon the earth; and all the past generations who have finished their course, and been long ago gathered unto their fathers. *We must all, says the Text, appear before the judgment-seat of Christ.* — No privilege shall exempt the great, no obscurity shelter the low, from the Judgment of God. All the frivolous distinctions which fashion and vanity had introduced among men, shall at that day be annihilated. No longer shall we then appear under the personated characters of high and low, of rich and poor. — Under the simple characters of men and subjects of God, we shall be brought forth to be judged according to our works. In the one great distinction of good and bad, of righteous or wicked, all other distinctions shall then be eternally lost. — Let the foresight of this humble the pride of the ostentatious and the great. Thou who now carriest thy head so high, shalt, upon the same footing with thy lowest dependent, stand before the tribunal of the Almighty. Thou who now oppressest thy weak brother with impunity, shalt then tremble for thine own safety as much, perhaps more than he. *For there is no respect of persons with God.* — The Last Day is justly styled the *day of the revelation of the secrets of all hearts.* Stripped of all disguise, the character of every man shall be unveiled to public view. Then shall the false friend be detected, the concealed slanderer be exposed, the secret adulterer, the treacherous enemy, the hypocritical pretender, be all brought to light. — What a check should the thoughts of this discovery give to the arts of dissimulation and falsehood? What avails it thee, O wise man of the world! to pass for a short time with fair colours before the eye of men, if by the eye of God thou art already discovered, and shalt, at last, be discovered to the view of all mankind? If now thou art so solicitous to conceal thy real character

from the world, and canst not bear that the designs and intrigues which have passed through thy mind in the course of but one day should be all made known, dost thou not tremble at the thought of the whole machinations of thy life being brought forth and proclaimed before assembled men and angels?—At this great day, too, when secret vice is made known in order to be punished, secret virtue shall be disclosed and rewarded. The humble good man, who passed unnoticed through the obscurity of private life; whose days, if not marked by any splendid deeds, were ennobled by virtuous actions, shall then be singled out from the crowd, and brought forward as the friend of God and Heaven. — The anguish of the wicked, upon the discovery and comparison of the life of such a person with their own, is thus beautifully described by one of the Apocryphal writers: *This was he whom we had sometimes in derision, and a proverb of reproach. We fools accounted his life madness, and his end to be without honour. Now he is numbered among the children of God, and his lot is among the saints. But we wearied ourselves in the way of destruction. What hath pride profited us? Or what good hath riches with our vaunting brought us? All those things are passed away like a shadow, and as a post that hasteth by. But the righteous live for evermore. Their reward also is with the Lord; and the care of them with the Most High.* * — From this view of the persons who are to appear before the judgment-seat of Christ, let us,

In the third place, Go on to the consideration of the things for which they are to be judged. These, we are told in the Text, are all the things done in the body, whether they be good or bad. This is the constant tenour of Scripture, that men are to be judged according to their actions. It is not said that men are to be finally judged according to their principles or belief, but according to their works. This does not lead to any conclusion that principles or belief are not essential in forming a character. Without good principles it cannot be expected there can be any regular tenour of good actions. But actions are the test of principles. Whatever we may pretend as to our belief, it is the strain of our actions that must show whether our principles have been good or bad; and supposing them ever so good, whether we have allowed them to exert a proper influence on our conduct. The constant doctrine of the Gospel is, *by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, but he that doeth the will of my Father, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven.* † — Of all the actions we have done, it is represented that, in the day of Judgment, strict examination shall be taken. Not our public conduct only, and what we reckon the momentous parts of our life, but the indulgence of our private pleasures, the amusements of our secret thoughts and idle hours, shall be brought into account. According to that emblematical representation given in the Gospel, which I before mentioned as an expressive figure, there is an invisible pen always writing over our heads, and making an exact register of all the transactions of our life. — How careful and circumspect ought this to render us over every part of our behaviour? If any of our

* Wisdom of Solomon, v. 3—15.

† Matt. vii. 20, 21.

actions were of a transient and fugitive nature; if they were to die with us, and to be forgotten as soon as we are gone, there might be some excuse for a loose and inconsiderate conduct. But we know the case to be widely different; and that what we are doing now, we do for eternity. None of our actions perish and are forgotten. They will all accompany us to the tribunal of God. They will there testify, either for or against us; and, however much we might wish to disclaim some of them, they may be considered as lifting up their voices and saying, "We are thine, for thou hast done us; we are thy works, and we will follow thee!"

It will now be said, If so severe a scrutiny must be undergone for all we have done and thought, who shall be able to stand before God in Judgment? How far from innocence shall the best of us be found at that day?—The thought is undoubtedly alarming. But let us not despond; we are assured, *there is forgiveness with God, that he may be feared. He is not extreme to mark iniquity; for he knows our frame, and remembers we are dust.* Powerful is the atonement of our blessed Redeemer to procure pardon for the greatest sinner who has been penitent. We have all reason to believe, that, amidst numberless infirmities which attend humanity, what the great Judge will chiefly regard, is the habitual prevailing turn of our heart and life; how far we have been actuated by a sincere desire to do our duty. This we know for certain, that all the measures of this Judgment shall be conducted with most perfect equity.* God will not exact from any man what he had never given him. He will judge him according to the degree of light that was afforded him, according to the means of knowledge and improvement that were put into his hands. Hence, many a virtuous heathen shall be preferred before many mere professors of Christian faith. *They shall come from the east and the west, the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God; when the children of the kingdom are cast out.** For, as the Apostle to the Romans hath taught us, *they who sinned without the law, that is, without knowledge of the written law, shall perish, shall be judged, without the law; for when the Gentiles which have not the law, do, by nature, the things contained in the law, these having not the law, are a law unto themselves.*†—In the account given by our Lord of the procedure of the Last Judgment, in the 25th chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, particular stress is laid upon works of beneficence and mercy; on the hungry being fed, the naked being clothed, and the sick being visited by the righteous. But though, in that parable, no virtues of any other kind are particularized, we are certainly not to infer any exclusion of other parts of duty; of piety, justice, temperance, and purity; as requisite to the character of the man, who, at the Last Day, will be accepted by God. The scope of the parable was to impress that covetous and selfish nation of the Jews, to whom the parable was addressed, with a deep sense of the importance of those virtues in which they were remarkably deficient, and which are in themselves so essential, compassion and humanity to their brethren.—It now only remains,

Luke, xiii. 29. Matt. viii. 11, 12.

† Rom. ii. 12, 14.

IN the last place, To fix our attention on that final definitive sentence which is to close the whole procedure of the Last L., and to terminate for ever the hopes and fears of the human race. The righteous are by the Great Judge called to eternal life and happiness; and the wicked appointed to go into everlasting punishment. — Into those future habitations of the good and the bad, it is not ours to penetrate. All that we know is, that after the Judge hath pronounced the righteous to be the *blessed of his Father*, they shall be *caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so they shall be ever with the Lord* *; received into mansions where all the inhabitants shall be blest; but where we are taught there shall be different degrees of exaltation and felicity, according to the advancement which men had made in holiness and virtue; *one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, and one star differing from another in glory*.† On the misery prepared for the reprobate, it would be shocking to dwell; and in a high degree improper and presumptuous in us to descant on the degree and duration of those punishments which infinite justice and wisdom may see cause to inflict on the incurably wicked. — The whole great scheme of Providence being now completed, and its ways fully justified to all rational beings, well may universal acclamations of praise arise from all the heavenly hosts; *Hallelujah to him that sitteth on the throne, and to the lamb of God, for ever and ever! Great and marvellous are all thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are all thy ways, thou King of Saints!* — This earth, which had been so long the theatre of human actions and human glory, having now accomplished the purpose for which, as a temporary structure, it was erected, shall, at this consummation of things, finally disappear from the universe. *The heavens shall pass away with a great noise; the elements shall melt with fervent heat; the earth and the works that are therein shall be burnt up; and its place shall know it no more!*

LET us hear the conclusion of the whole matter; *Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole of man; the whole of his duty, his interest, and his happiness.* It is the road to a comfortable life, to a peaceful death, to a happy eternity. *For God, addeth the wise man, shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.* — Let the prospect of this Judgment so dwell on our minds as to produce that degree of seriousness which, in this vain and changing world, becomes us as Christians, becomes us as men. If it be our care, to preserve a good conscience, and to do the things that are right, that Judgment will not be to us an object of dismay. On the contrary, amidst the many discouragements which our virtuous endeavours meet with at present, it will be a comfort to think that *verily there is a just God to judge the earth*, who shall in the end *make all crooked things straight*, and fully recompense his servants for the hardships they may now suffer by persevering in the path of integrity. — This is the season, not of reaping, but of sowing; not of rest and enjoyment, but of labour

* 1 Thess. iv. 17.

† 1 Cor. xv. 41.

‡ 2 Pet. iii. 10

and combat. You are now running the race; hereafter you shall receive the prize. You are now approving your fidelity, in the midst of trials; at the Last Day you shall receive the crown of the faithful. *Be patient, therefore, establish your hearts, for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. The Judge is at hand, and his reward is with him.*

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THE END.

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